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CRUELLA, LEAKY SUE OR HOME SECRETARY?



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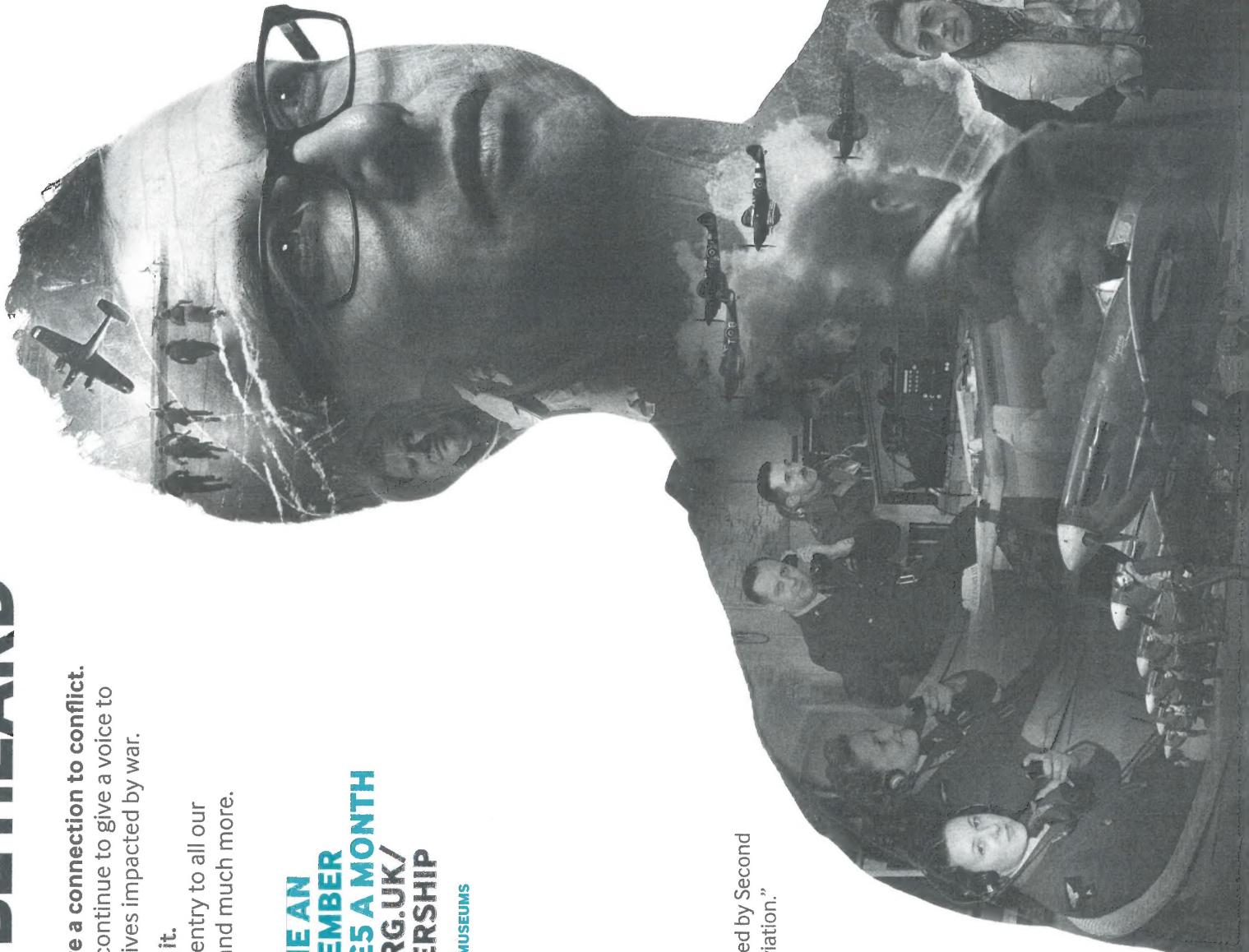
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SCAN ME

"Feeling
warmer
now,
grandad?"



MURTY MONEY

If Rishi Sunak's dodging of questions on ending "non-domiciled" tax status as part of efforts to fill the fiscal hole are anything to go by, his wife Akshata Murty is set to continue enjoying the status for a while yet.

Although earlier this year she ceased to claim the benefits of the status, she did not relinquish it and could still invoke it to save nine-figure sums on any inheritance or capital gains tax arising on her £700m or so of overseas assets.

She would lose her non-dom status if she were to commit permanently to Britain as opposed to India, which would lead to her acquiring a "domicile of choice" in the UK and thereby forfeit entitlement to tax breaks on overseas income. Deep attachment to Great Britain and huge tax breaks aren't always easy to reconcile.

DOCKING PAY

WITH Rishi Sunak inside No 10, the freeports policy with which he launched himself at high office as a new MP seems assured. As do the fiscal and other threats freeports pose – not least because policing their boundaries is largely being handed to the conflicted private companies running the ports (*Eyes passim*).

The latest freeports to reveal the "responsible authorities" whose job will be to ensure prohibited goods don't get in or out and that unauthorised activities aren't conducted in special "customs sites" (into which goods can move duty-free) are at Plymouth and Felixstowe. At Plymouth, the job for the next ten years falls to Devonport Royal Dockyard Ltd, owned by defence company Babcock, which describes its business as "the maintenance and refit of Royal Navy warships and submarines", plus other engineering services. There's no mention of controlling tax borders or any sign of experience in the business.

In Felixstowe, meanwhile, port operator the Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company will police its nearby customs site. This company is part of the CK Hutchison group, registered in the Cayman Islands, based in Hong Kong and a keen freeport cheerleader. Both port companies are valuable cash cows for their owners. Felixstowe Dock and Railway Company contributed £78m in pre-tax profits to the Hutchison group, while Devonport Royal Dockyard made £64m, down from £105m the previous year. These are useful returns that their corporate owners might not want to see threatened by them marking their own homework too strictly.

● *Chemical brothers*, p 38



NUMBER CRUNCHING

£20bn

Amount that, as a keen Brexiteer in 2016, Rishi Sunak said 'we will immediately save' on leaving the EU

£80bn

Long run annual cost to UK economy from leaving EU as assessed by the Office for Budget Responsibility

BATTLE OF TWITS

THE first days of Elon Musk's ownership of Twitter have been predictably chaotic. The chaos extends to what may or may not now be deemed acceptable speech under the self-styled "Chief Twit".

Musk initially suggested he would oversee creation of a Facebook-style "content moderation council with widely diverse viewpoints", but later seemed to favour splitting the platform into "sections" with varying approaches to what is acceptable.

The uncertainty is already having an impact. In the 12 hours after Musk's takeover, researchers at the Network Contagion Research Institute found instances of hate speech rose more than 500 percent, while previously banned extremist groups such as Britain First were again able to maintain a presence on Twitter. Last weekend Musk even made his own contribution, tweeting (then later deleting) a baseless conspiracy theory about the vicious assault on the husband of Democrat Nancy Pelosi, US House speaker.

One major advertiser, General Motors, has already paused its ad spend on the platform – and it's unlikely to be the last.

However, there are those who think Musk is doing a marvellous job. Step forward the chairman of the Kingdom Holding Company, an investment group which is now Twitter's second-largest investor. Fun fact: Kingdom Holding Company is based in that liberal bastion of free speech, er, Saudi Arabia.

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EVENTS, DEAR BOY...

"Will anyone buy my Liz Truss book?" asked a forlorn James Heale in the *Spectator* on 26 October.

He was referring to the biography of the Lady Jane Grey of prime ministers he had co-written with Harry Cole, political editor of the *Sun* (prop: R. Murdoch) and that HarperCollins (prop: R. Murdoch) had scheduled for publication on 8 December. This was highlighted in the last *Eye*, and subsequently by keen *Eye* reader Keir Starmer at prime minister's questions. The answer came quite swiftly: Friday, Saturday and Sunday last week saw the *Truss book*, hastily re-subtitled *The Inside Story of the Unexpected Rise and Rapid Fall of Liz Truss*, serialised lavishly in every single one of the News UK papers (prop: R. Murdoch); the *Sun*, *Times* and the *Sunday Times*.

Previously, Biteback Publishing had announced in September that Lord Ashcroft (Biteback's proprietor, though it omitted to say) was to write a biography of the new PM. By then HarperCollins had commissioned its book, but Ashcroft still felt there was room for another, taking a more long-term view. "It has always been my intention to incorporate into this book an analysis of Truss's first year in office... One of my hopes is that this biography might serve as a valuable guide to the electorate in the months leading up to the next general election." Like its subject, the biography has now been swiftly dropped, and Ashcroft says his Life of Liz has "morphed into an examination of the Conservative Party's self-destruction... It seems only natural that my next book should be on that subject." No danger of *that* being overtaken by events...

MATT FINISH

TO piccadilly a fortnight ago for the screening at Bafta of a one-hour promotional documentary celebrating the 200th anniversary of the *Sunday Times*. Any mention of the paper's role in the Hitler Diaries saga is naturally *verbotten*, but the highlight of the evening is no less awkward.

Among those interviewed on camera is ST columnist Camilla Long, who says that one of the most enjoyable moments of her job in recent years was "waking up on a Friday morning and there were those pictures of Matt Hancock groping his girlfriend. This couldn't have been better timing for me – I always enjoy a good scandal, ha ha!" Cue loud guffaws in the auditorium as everyone realises that Hancock is by said girlfriend, who looks severely unamused.

Why would he want to be there, anyway? The film also makes much of the *ST* Insight team's exposé of ministerial mistakes in the run-up to the March 2020 lockdown ("38 days when Britain sleepwalked into disaster"). When this story first appeared, Matt Hancock furiously denounced the *Sunday Times* for publishing "falsehoods and errors" – but he's now so desperate to get himself back into a proper job he will turn up to the opening of an envelope.

IN A time when almost everything is being described as "unprecedented", thanks are due to *Eye* reader Colin Bayliss, who wrote in with an uncanny precedent for the news of the past few weeks.

In 1812 that national debt was ballooning, war was stalking Europe, the Tory party was struggling to stay together, and its previous leader (Spencer Perceval) had just lost the job at short notice (by being assassinated). The newly appointed prime minister, Lord Liverpool, was the Prince Regent's fifth choice for the post, at 42 was very young for the job, and was widely expected not to last long. And how did that pan out? He stayed in office for just shy of 15 years...

200 YEARS AGO...

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NEWS

FOXES & HUNT

CHANCELLOR Jeremy Hunt's new economic advisory council looks less a parliament of wise owls and more a *skulk of foxes* patrolling the hen house.

Chairing the group is **Rupert Harrison**, right-hand man to George Osborne back in the day and instrumental in the austerity that – via the Brexit vote for by a disaffected nation at the end of the latter's tenure – explains much of the economic crisis supposedly demanding Harrison's services again.

Harrison left government in 2015 for the world's largest asset manager, BlackRock, where he became managing director of its "dynamic diversified growth team" (not something he delivered for UK plc, alas) and is now in charge of research for "diversified strategies" as well as running his own funds. The conflicts of interest inherent in Harrison's latest position are obvious. If his funds are holding government or other bonds, for example, policies that increase their value – perhaps ones that too conservatively shore up government finances at the expense of the growth that is so lacking in the UK – will suit his portfolio nicely. And will Harrison be able to remove his BlackRock "research" hat as he gets an advantageous inside take on the UK economy? His less than punctilious approach to conflicts of interest was already shown by his move to the firm having held extensive meetings with it while drawing up policy for Osborne (*Eyes passim*).

Harrison could use a helping hand. The investment tracking website Citywire Selector ranks his performance at an unspectacular 517th best out of 960 mixed asset fund managers over the past year and says his portfolios were hit by a 4.1 percent fall in September, presumably linked to the mini-budget fiasco and indicating that he could benefit from strong fiscal medicine (for everybody else).

So is Harrison's influence balanced by others perhaps more concerned about ordinary people's incomes? Er, no. The other three members include **Karen Ward**, head of economic strategy at JP Morgan Asset Management and a short-lived adviser to Philip Hammond as chancellor in 2016/17. Her interests look similar to and every bit as conflicted as Harrison's. Then there is **Gertjan Vlieghe**, a former Bank of England monetary policy committee member who is now chief economist at US hedge fund Element Capital, which has a Mayfair operation. To make its money, says the firm, "we... focus our efforts on forecasting the reaction of financial markets to macro developments which aren't well understood by machines". Major economic moves, in other words. How handy to have a man at the table influencing and potentially getting wind of them before everybody else!

Completing the line-up is **Sushil Wadhwani** of PGIM Wadhwani, a London-based hedge fund backed by a US insurance company. "Our experience in the financial sector, academia and policy-making gives us an edge in signal generation," it says of how it makes a crust. Should get some useful "policy-making" signals around Hunt's economic advisory council table.

KEEPING THE LIGHTS ON

A HILARIOUS turn of events in Brussels, where civil servants have pointed out to France that if it gets its way for the *soi-disant "cap on wholesale energy prices"*, there's nothing to stop the UK importing cheap electricity – *subsidised by EU members!*

That's because, firstly, wholesale prices are set by world markets, whatever France or the EU would like. The only way to limit them is for governments to fund a rebate whenever they rise above the "capped" level, or go without (*Eye 1575*). Secondly, the Brexit arrangements ensure free trade in energy between the UK and Europe. This is needed as a matter of life and death by Ireland, which is critically dependent on flows to and from Britain; and it is extremely useful to most countries, not least France right now, as it needs imports of both gas and electricity. If there's subsidised electricity swilling around in Europe, we can buy it.

The French farce over "capping" stems from an ignorance among European politicians as to how markets work. Many hanker for the days when they had state monopolies over energy and there were no markets at all. Alas for the *dirigistes*, individual governments wanting price caps is a bit like a local council not liking the price of petrol at the pump. Solo price-setting is no longer possible in a fully connected global energy system unless you are willing to stump up vast sums of money to suspend the laws of supply and demand. Even then, when the subsidies run out, prices will once more find their own levels. Back to the *prix-fixe* drawing board for President Macron.

THE damage caused when energy regulator Ofgem takes its eye off the ball is clear, as seen in its failure to ensure energy companies were fit to hold the supply licences it so blithely handed out until recently (*Eyes passim*).

Around 50 firms have gone under, with Bulb, the largest, being nationalised to ensure its customers didn't suffer, at a cost to taxpayers of several billions. Even more costly are support measures for (thus-far) surviving suppliers, most prominently Ovo. The multi-billion tab would have been less if Ofgem had been more rigorous in its licensing in quieter times.

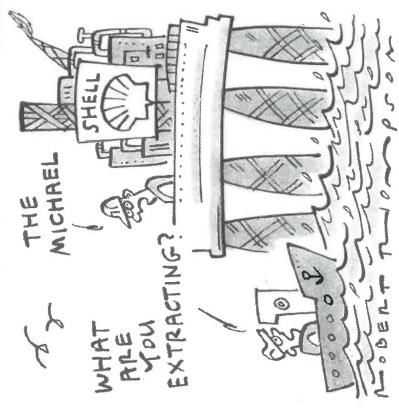
Nor is there any respite in sight. New chancellor Jeremy Hunt's first big decision was to curtail Liz Truss's two-year energy price-cap to six months; in April it will be revised again. It's not hard to see why: the full Truss programme would be staggeringly costly; it was hastily contrived (Truss had earlier promised there would be no "handouts"); its

largesse is indiscriminate (*Eye 1582*); and wholesale market prices are lurching alarmingly – down sharply in the short run, up again over longer horizons. An early review and subsequent changes will likely mean more work for Ofgem.

WHAT do Blair, Brown, Cameron, Osborne, May, Johnson, Truss and Kwarteng have in common? They all abased themselves before EDF and successive French presidents to get them to build new nukes in this country, essentially at UK bill-payers' expense.

All the evidence is that EDF's current nuclear model overshoots wildly on budget and is schedule in the construction phase and is nowhere operating satisfactorily. But this doesn't seem to matter. One of Johnson's parting shots as PM was to approve EDF's plan for Sizewell C in Suffolk – even though the project was his would-be successor Rishi Sunak. As chancellor, he was never convinced of Sizewell's merits, which would be a huge cost to UK taxpayers. Of course, Sunak then lost his first bid to be PM. The winner, Liz Truss, did exactly what Theresa May did with the Hinkley Point nuke proposal back in 2016 (*Eye 1428*): they both rushed to assure the respective French presidents that they'd do whatever EDF wanted – always at the expense of Joe Public.

But there are as yet no binding contracts signed for Sizewell construction, and Sunak again has the ball at his feet. Will he break with his predecessors' craven 15-year sequence of weekly signing on the line? '*Old Sparky*'



"After Russia made a great success in organising the 2018 World Cup, Russian friends have provided great support to Qatar, especially in terms of organisation. We thank you for this and we are proud of this relationship. This will continue until the end of the World Cup."

Putin in turn told the emir that Russia was "doing everything we can in terms of transferring the experience of preparing for the World Cup". Given this spirit of unity between the two autocratic leaders, it is easy to see why Fifa bosses were so delighted with the outcome of their unprecedented decision in 2010 to award hosting rights for two successive competitions – 2018 and 2022 – at the same time. "Less democracy is sometimes better for organising a World Cup," said Sepp Blatter's former right-hand man at Fifa, Jerome Valcke, in 2013. "When you have a very strong head of state who can decide, as may be Putin can do in 2018... that is easier for us organisers than a country such as Germany, where you have to negotiate at different levels." What a legacy indeed!



WORLD CUP FEVER

FIFA president Gianni Infantino is confident the £200bn football World Cup in Qatar will be the "best ever" but insists the tournament is also about "legacy".

"At a time of increased tension around the world, we should never underestimate the unifying power that something so unique has," said Infantino in a video message to mark one month until kick-off. So how did that work out last time? In 2018, the World Cup was held in Russia. Four years before his troops invaded Ukraine, Vladimir Putin milked the PR opportunity of being centre stage at the trophy presentation following France's victory over Croatia in the final.

Russia's football team was kicked out of the 2022 qualifying campaign as the country became a sporting pariah, but Putin's regime continues to play an active role in this month's finals. During a meeting between the Russian president and Qatar's emir in Kazakhstan last month, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani said:

WORDS FAIL ME

Teresa Monaciano

eCONomics

VIRAL NEWS

PROFITS OF DOOM Cheshire fat cats

EXCESS BAGGAGE

EXCESS deaths have shown a marked increase in the UK since the spring (*Eyes passim*), but also across Europe, the US and as far away as Australia, in countries with health services less decimated than ours, writes *MD*. So what's going on?

The risk of acute Covid and hospital admission after Omicron appears to be less, but because it has been much harder to stop and many countries have given up trying, it has spread far more widely, so the numbers dying are still significant.

Secondly, there is mounting evidence that any variant can increase longer-term risks of cardiovascular disease and stroke, particularly in those already susceptible, and many of the excess deaths are cardiovascular in origin. The stress of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis and falling levels of mental and physical health may also be contributing, as may the re-emergence of other respiratory viruses that were suppressed during lockdowns.

Difficulty accessing emergency care is also adding to avoidable deaths in the UK, and many more people are dying at home. Vaccines have been associated with myocarditis, but this is much rarer than myocarditis following Covid itself, and significant vaccine-related deaths have not been picked up on surveillance reporting. More research is needed, but it appears the SARS-CoV-2 virus has a sting in the tail beyond long Covid, and it is being felt around the world.

● *MD on the Tories & the NHS, p13*

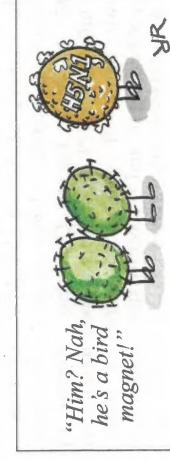
CLASS DIVIDE

DEPARTMENT for Education permanent secretary Susan Acland-Hood gave the troubled National Tutoring Programme (*Eyes passim*) supposed to help pupils catch up after Covid the thumbs-up last month, stating that, in her role as accounting officer, she was satisfied the scheme “represents good value for money for the Exchequer as a whole, and is feasible to deliver”. Really?

Two weeks later, the National Foundation for Educational Research published its long-awaited evaluation of the scheme’s first year, noting that it had “failed to achieve its focus” on helping disadvantaged pupils and that it was “unable to detect” whether the scheme had any effect on helping youngsters eligible for pupil premium to catch up with learning missed during lockdowns.

It also noted that many pupils did not complete all 12 sessions they were meant to have access to, and that many schools had scheduled tutoring during class time, meaning pupils receiving help in one way often lost out in another.

Then, last week, regulator Ofsted published its own report on the second year of the scheme in schools. It found that while teachers and heads said positive things about it, they didn’t really know whether it was working or not. The report also found that tuition was causing youngsters to miss out on either classroom time or lunchtime and after-school activities such as sport and music. And in 10 of the 63 schools inspectors visited, tuition under the scheme was “haphazard and poorly planned”.

“Him? Nah, he’s a bird magnet!” 

PROFITS OF DOOM Cheshire fat cats

THE vast investment in Covid testing is creating a long-term legacy for one business: the private equity industry.

When the then health secretary Matt Hancock belatedly got his act together on testing, the big money went not just on the tests but also on the laboratories urgently needed to process them. One of the new so-called Lighthouse labs, a “historic moment” according to Hancock, was at Alderley Park in Cheshire, as part of the non-profit, government-funded Medicines Discovery Catapult centre (MDC).

The idea behind this centre is that surpluses generated are re-invested in future research. And very substantial surpluses are, thanks to Covid. Results for the company running the lab at Alderley Park, Medicines Discovery Catapult Services Ltd, show that over two years from the start of the pandemic it made pre-tax profits of £54m from income from the taxpayer of £122m.

MDC was already, however, seeking a private buyer to “transition the laboratory into a post-pandemic supplier of a portfolio of high value, mass diagnostics to both public and private sector customers”. As *Eye 1557* suggested a year ago, “the lab is likely to be sold off to yet another firm seeking to profit from the NHS, with public money effectively used to enhance the private sector”.

This has proved not far off the mark. MDC has “demobilised” the lab. But in its place appears a new company called Alderley Lighthouse Labs Ltd, set up in May by two men who worked on the original Lighthouse lab, Simon Chapman and Mark Wigglesworth, and using assets acquired from the government-funded predecessor – including the Lighthouse branding.

Now, seeking to cash in on this legacy, arrives private equity group Seneca Growth Capital VCT. Under the badge of “tax-advantaged investing”, it has announced a £500,000 investment in Alderley Lighthouse Labs, which filings at Companies House show give it somewhere between 25 and 50 percent ownership of the company.

Wigglesworth, chief executive at Alderley Lighthouse Labs Ltd, announced himself “delighted to have secured funding for the company” and “looking forward to applying the key lessons learnt during the pandemic”. If Seneca’s marketing blurb is anything to go by, its backers will be looking to escape some tax thanks to the pandemic. Among its “reasons to invest” in the relevant fund are “tax advantages including 30 percent income tax relief, CGT-exempt gains and tax-free dividends”. What’s not to like?

Robertsons’ juice

FEW people have made a more profitable entrée into the healthcare product business than to Covid than Oxfordshire brothers Luke and Ross Robertson, who set up Medco Solutions Ltd days after the first lockdown began in March 2020, ostensibly to team up with a Swedish supplier of medical equipment. The brothers, formerly operating in the investment and banking worlds, had a very rewarding first couple of years. On the back of PPE contracts, in 2020 they made profits of £19.6m from income of £94m, paying themselves dividends of £6.2m – all this despite £33m worth of the company’s PPE kit ending up in the “do not supply” pile (see *Eye 1568*).

Last year things were even better, with income rising to £380m, this time on the back of contracts to supply lateral flow tests. This would have generated profits of £4.4m had they not incurred mysterious “administrative expenses” running to £59m. The accounting small print reveals that

£57.5m of this was due to “related parties” but says nothing about precisely what administration was performed for the vast fee. The bill does, however, reduce Medco Solutions Ltd’s taxable profits by a corresponding amount. There was still enough in the pot for further dividends of £6.4m. The company declined to say who the related parties and what the supposed services were.

This year looks juicier still for the Robertsons. The company’s largest lateral flow test contract (£325m) ran from last September to July this year, and it had other contracts running up to as recently as August totalling £297m.

No wonder the Robertsons have recently been able to set up their own luxury property development business. Good to see so much public money being ploughed back into helping ordinary people.

Schilling spree

EARLIER this year Westminster’s public accounts committee (PAC) issued a scathing report on the government’s dealings with testing firm Randox, which secured plump deals during the early days of the pandemic (*Eye 1579*).

MPs on the committee noted poor record-keeping at the Department for Health and Social Care, which failed to address potential conflicts of interest, and ministers allowing the firm to get away with runaway profits. Now it has emerged that Randox called in reputation management experts Schilling in an attempt to get the MPs to “formally withdraw” their report.

The lawyers, who describe themselves as being “on a mission to establish the true narrative” but are better known for threatening legal action against pesky journalists, declared in a letter to the committee that the inquiry had failed to observe “basic principles of natural justice”. Schilling took particular exception to claims that Randox’s profits had increased a hundredfold during the pandemic, branding this a “wholesale misrepresentation”.

The legal firm may want to alert its client that the same “misrepresentation” appears in the accounts of a certain Randox Laboratories Limited, where the directors use the same figures to boast of the company’s healthy performance during Covid: £177m in profit in the 18 months to July 2021, compared to just £1.2m in the same period to June 2020. A fact not lost on the PAC chair, Meg Hillier, who curtly informed Schilling: “I consider this matter closed.”

POLICE NEWS

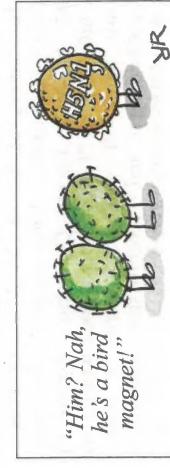
DEVON and Cornwall Police became the latest force to be placed in special measures last month after inspectors found it “does not answer, or respond to, emergency or non-emergency calls within adequate timeframes, and too many calls are abandoned”.

The findings, from His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), mean 14 of 29 forces inspected in the past two years have been rated either “inadequate” or “requires improvement” in the area of “investigating crime”.

Recent inspections have been dire. In Staffordshire, inspectors this summer found: “In some cases, investigations were not carried out promptly, and relevant and proportionate lines of inquiry weren’t always completed.”

In fact, the only thing UK police forces are worse at than investigating crime, according to HMICFRS, is “responding to the public” about it, with 16 forces either inadequate or requiring improvement.

● *See Old Coppers and the Met, p38*



Street OfS haMe

BEST MAN SPEECH
JAMES FORSYTH devoted his *Times* column last Friday to the new prime minister. Unlike Truss, he wrote, Rishi Sunak “only likes to take calculated risks and doesn’t take the riskier option for the sake of it. Sunak is not an impulsive politician. He likes to explore questions before coming to a conclusion.”

And so it continued. “He is also driven by information... Those whose advice he seeks are often struck by the research he does beforehand...” Sunak’s “irreducible core” is a belief in fiscal responsibility, one of the strongest cards a Conservative PM can have: “In Sunak, the Tories have found the best person to play it.”

Below the piece was the regular line: “James Forsyth is political editor of the *Spectator*”. No mention of a more germane detail: that the politician and the columnist have been bosom buddies since they were schoolboys at Winchester. Sunak was best man at Forsyth’s wedding, and the Forsyths and Sunaks are godparents to each other’s children (*Eye*, 1578). As one *Times* reader put it: “Rishi’s best mate pops up with ‘Rishi is brilliant’ article.”

Times editor Tony Gallagher clearly doesn’t think it an interest worth declaring. *Spectator* editor Fraser Nelson thinks otherwise. Last week’s *Spectator* also had a piece by Forsyth on Sunak – in which, by contrast, readers were told in the very first paragraph that the new prime minister was a man “whom, I should say, I have been friends with for many years”.

SUN SALAD DAZE

SALAD dressings-down all round at the *Sun*, where a post-mortem was initiated over why it had been the *Daily Star* that enjoyed such a runaway success with its liveream of a lettuce decaying less quickly than the government of Liz Truss.

It was precisely the sort of publicity-provoking stunt the *Sun* used to specialise in back in the day (England manager Graham Taylor’s career never recovered from the *Sun’s* repeated depictions of him as a turnip in the 1990s), but those have died out under a succession of insipid and uninspired editors in recent years.

The *Star*, meanwhile, has been enjoying widespread praise for just the sort of irreverent and fun front pages the *Sun* used to specialise in – although this has stubbornly failed to translate into people buying the paper, with sales down 16 percent year on year. (For all anyone knows, things are even worse at the *Sun*, which like several other papers stopped publishing circulation figures in 2020, so precipitous were their decline.)

The vegetable recriminations went all the way to the top at News UK – until it was pointed out that the *Star*’s live feed of the lettuce had had 350,000 people tuning in at peak times, and more than 1.7m viewers in total, while Rupert Murdoch’s TalkTV is regularly recording a big fat zero watching.

The company has spent hundreds of millions on the channel – a reported £50m on a cross-media contract for barely viewed presenter Piers Morgan alone – and the suggestion that some of this cash might have been deployed to encourage the sort of “creativity” they were after elsewhere in the empire did not go down well.



Malcontent creator

ROTHER - MERE DETAIL...

THE Daily Mail may have doubted Rishi Sunak over the summer but it swung firmly behind the new prime minister last week for his first PMQs. Disgracefully, the opposition was “deploying the politics of envy.”

“Labour was accused of dirty tricks and launching a smear campaign against Rishi Sunak and his wife yesterday by calling for non-dom tax status to be abolished,” it railed. Calling for a change in the law? Disgusting!

It got worse: Labour was only doing this because “Mr Sunak’s multi-millionaire wife, Akshata Murthy, was a non-domiciled UK resident... she avoided UK taxes on her overseas earnings in return for paying an annual charge of £30,000. The arrangement is perfectly legal.”

The same day, columnist Daniel Johnson decided the attacks on “Rishi Rich” showed not only envy but “blatant racism”, and the paper’s leader asserted that “with rank hypocrisy, Labour has resorted to smear tactics over his wealth”. The nerve of attacking a couple worth £700m when there’s a cost of living crisis! Sadly, the inclusion of no fewer than three pieces on the “politics of envy” meant there was no room to mention anyone else who might lose out if non-dom status were abolished – such as, er, Lord Rothermere, the non-domiciled owner of the *Daily Mail*.

TRULY HADLEY DEEPLY

AFTER 22 years at the *Grauniad*, columnist and feature writer Hadley Freeman is moving to the *Sunday Times*. “She is a wonderful writer and has been a fantastic *Guardian* colleague for many years,” editor-in-chief Kath Viner told *Press Gazette* last month. “We wish her all the best.”

Freeman’s valediction is less complimentary. In a scathing farewell letter to Viner, which the *Eye* has seen, she writes that “you and I have known for some time that I no longer fit at the *Guardian*”. Why not?

“The *Guardian* used to embrace complicated issues, nuance, controversy, debates between writers, alternative views. When I started at the *Guardian* in 2000, the most fraught subject was Israel, with Jonathan Freedland and Seumas Milne representing the two sides of that polarised debate. No one, as far as I know, ever said to them that they couldn’t write about it because they felt so strongly about the subject, or they had personal connections to it, or they spoke about it before, as has been said to me and other women writers about the gender argument. Rather, Jonathan and Seumas were allowed, even encouraged, to express their opposing views... This is the opposite of what has happened about the gender issue.”

Yes, it’s that perennial favourite. Since 2020, when more than 300 *Guardian* employees signed a letter denouncing the paper for publishing “anti-trans views”, Viner has tried to forestall further complaints by keeping “gender critical” articles from Freeman and other *Grauniad* women out of the paper. In recent years, Freeman

FREE AS A BIRD!

LAST weekend, as Elon Musk’s takeover of Twitter was completed, the *Sun* knew who was responsible for the awful state of the platform: the left!

An editorial explained that “this cesspit site is merely a platform for mainly left-wing no-marks to scream abuse at strangers they disagree with... If Musk’s takeover and his sacking of Twitter’s senior staff ends the woke censorship of almost entirely right-wing voices, and corrects the political bias, good.”

This was accompanied by a piece written by Douglas Murray expanding on the theme that Twitter had been silencing the free press, that “people who were on the fringes of the political Right or conservative movements found themselves chucked off” – including Donald Trump himself – and that Twitter had even interfered with the last US election by locking the Twitter accounts of the *New York Post* and preventing it disseminating a story about Joe Biden’s son Hunter.

What Murray neglected to mention was that the Federal Election Commission had decided Twitter had not violated any federal election law.

And how were the *Sun*’s hopes for a bright new dawn of right-wing freedom borne out? Trolls bombarded the platform with tens of thousands of offensive comments, far-right groups such as Britain First (whose leader has spent time in jail for hate crimes against Muslims) immediately rejoined the platform with delight, and Musk himself tweeted a link to conspiracist nonsense about the attack on House speaker Nancy Pelosi’s husband.

BONFIRE OF THE SUBS

“Ancestor of Dr Zhivago author loses legal battle.” – Daily Telegraph, 26 October, reporting the outcome of a plagiarism case brought by Anna Pasternak, Boris’s great-niece

reminds Viner, “I have repeatedly suggested to multiple section editors” that they commission an investigation into the trans children’s charity Mermaids. “But to no avail, either because of the editors’ ideological beliefs or – more likely – their fear of the reaction in the office.”

Mermaids is now being investigated by the Charity Commission. “It is astonishing to me,” the departing hack tells her editor, “that the progressive media has handed such an own goal to the right, closing its eyes to concerns about the safeguarding out of fear that to do otherwise would lead to accusations of bigotry. You have said that both sides in the gender debate are equally passionate – but only one side demands censorship. It seems to me that at the *Guardian* that side has won.”

Freeman concludes that “the paper has become internally dysfunctional, with writers and editors alike all terrified of saying The Wrong Take. I saw this coming in the Corbyn era when I was repeatedly warned off writing about Labour from my perspective as a Jew. Then I was told not to write about gender from my perspective as a woman. When I asked what part of my identity was acceptable to turn into copy, it was suggested that I write about my children.”

Or Freeman could of course have followed the example of Adrian Chiles, whose work is clearly acceptable to Viner given that he is now her husband. Recent *Grauniad* columns by Chiles include “I spent an afternoon writing my own name. It was lovely until I started overthinking it” and “I recently saw something in a petrol station toilet southbound on the M1 that I can never unsee”. Journalism at its finest!

EATING THEIR WORDS: THOSE TRUSS STUMPPERS IN FULL

BROKEN TELEGRAPH

THE mad professor byline photo of Allister Heath was barely absent from the *Telegraph* over the summer and early autumn, and he had but one thing on his mind: “Truss is winning because she promises to fight the failed groupthink ruining Britain,” as he put it on 27 July.

On 3 August he gleefully identified Truss Derangement Syndrome – not what you might think, with hindsight, but the fact that “she is driving all of the right people mad, and their increasingly unhinged contempt is proving her best recruiting sergeant among a Tory membership desperate to sock it to the Left”.

From there, the rapturous pronouncements came thick and fast: “The Tories can’t afford to mess this up again; it’s Truss’s way, or a Labour landslide in 2024” (17 August); “I’m optimistic about the Truss government... it is absurd to state, almost as self-evident fact, that it is bound to collapse, that it cannot last even two years... It is astonishing that pundits with no understanding of economics dismiss the prime minister’s ability in this area” (7 September); “Her plans appear almost too good to be true... Go for it, prime minister: this is your one chance to engineer a British renaissance” (21 September); “The best Budget I have ever heard a British chancellor deliver, by a massive margin” (23 September); “Her vision is exactly right” (28 September).

As late as 12 October, just two days before Truss sacked her chancellor and began her spectacular vainglorious U-turns, Heath remained an increasingly lonely voice in the wilderness – “Kwarteng’s mini-budget contained a wonderful collection of pro-growth policies... Contrary to the Left’s propaganda, they didn’t crash the economy – it was about to come tumbling down anyway.”

And then... nothing. The *Telegraph*’s opinion pages remained a Heath-free zone – right up until last Thursday when, with Rishi Sunak suddenly installed in Downing Street, a new column appeared. It began: “Some prime ministers are forgotten almost immediately after they leave office; others haunt their successors from beyond the grave.” Was he really here to bury his heroine, not to praise her? No. He was talking about Clement Attlee (cardinal sin: to have “socialised the whole cost of population ageing”). The late Liz Truss went completely unmentioned.

TWILIGHT EXPRESS

“SUNAK is already restoring a sense of purpose and stability,” asserted a *Daily Express* editorial on 25 October. “Let us now allow Mr Sunak’s new government to take his ideas forward and accept that they have replaced the slash-and-burn economics of Ms Truss and Kwarteng for very good reason.” Columnist Patrick O’Flynn, meanwhile, declared that “alarm bells should have rung louder in the leadership campaign”. Were there even the faintest traces of tinnitus abulation over Truss’s plans in the *Express* over the summer? Were there heck.

On 9 August the paper’s editorial column scoffed at how “Sunak describes Truss’ promises of radical economic plans as ‘starry-eyed boosterism’; but she makes no apology for being optimistic and nor should she”. Two editorials in August doubled down on the paper’s endorsement: “Support is growing for Truss’ economic plan” and “Proof Liz Truss is on right track with the economy”.

The “proof” was that serially incorrect economist Patrick Minford, who once claimed hard Brexit could boost GDP by 6.8 percent, had “echoed Ms Truss’ instincts and recommended taxes be lowered... With such august backing, Ms Truss presents a pathway through the mire.” By late July O’Flynn was “firmly team Truss”:

“left-wingers who dismissed her as ‘lightweight... are likely to find they have underestimated her’.”

The *Express*’s sunny outlook continued even after the fallout from her and Kwarteng’s calamitous mini-Budget. On 24 September, the paper told readers Truss and Kwarteng’s plans provided “a route out of the nation’s current problems”. In early October an editorial insisted “the plan set out by Ms Truss is the right one for our country and we hope she will now be allowed to deliver it”. As recently as 10 October, the paper was even urging readers to “Rally behind Liz Truss’ vision for our future”. What a difference a fortnight makes!

THE DAILY MAIL STROM

IT WAS, the *Daily Mail* declared, “a new dawn for Britain”. Rishi Sunak had made an “inspirational rise” to No 10.

“In recent months, the Tories have been little more than a fractious rabble”, its editorial column declared. “From this day forward, they must grow up and unite behind their new leader... The former chancellor becomes party leader and prime minister with the overwhelming support of Tory MPs. Their choice must be respected and embraced.” Sunak was, of course, also the choice of

SPECTACULAR REVERSE FERRETS

“As Truss launches her bid to be next PM, Sunak is forced to deny links to Boris’s poison-spreading ex-adviser Dominic Cummings? It reported on 11 July with the help of irregular columnist Nadine Dorries. That day’s editorial opined that “many were appalled when he knifed Mr Johnson. And some feel he is too sympathetic to the Silicon Valley web giants to rein in their excesses.”

“Truss: Back me or it’ll be Rishi” was the even-handed splash next day. On 13 July a gruesome twosome were deployed with

“Dorries accuses the Rishi camp of ‘dirty tricks’ to fix key voting” and Jacob Rees-Mogg adding: “She fought Rishi’s tax hikes and the Whitehall blob – that’s why I’m backing Liz Truss”.

The editorial of 16 July reminded readers that Sunak had raised “national insurance – a kamikaze decision which the *Mail* campaigned hard against. On 18 July the paper shared Tory donor Lord Cruddas’s social media post that Sunak was “not fit for high office”, “a ‘rat’, a treacherous snake”, ‘fishy Rishi’, and the leader of a ‘coup’ who ‘must be removed’”. On 23 July Rishi was “accused of peddling Project Fear” for saying Truss’s tax plans would make mortgages more expensive – fancy that!

Last week, however, the *Mail* had moved on to decrying how “The Left’s sneering attacks on Rishi show they hate aspiration”. You’d never catch the *Daily Mail* behaving like that!



“Liz has the boldness, vision and strength of conviction to build on what Boris began” – *Daily Mail front page*, 3 August
“Cometh the hour, cometh the woman...” – *Daily Mail front page*, 6 September

“Truss was a disastrous dalliance who served only to remind us what a real leader looks like.” – *Daily Mail front page*, 21 October
“I’m backing Liz Truss for PM to lead the talented team that will deliver for Britain.” – *David Frost*, *Telegraph*, 14 July
“Why Kwarteng is right and Carney is wrong.” – *David Frost*, *Telegraph*, 29 September

“Don’t give up on Truss yet – she can rebound.” – *David Frost*, *Telegraph*, 5 October
“Liz Truss has to go if the Tory party is to have any chance of recovering.” – *David Frost*, *Telegraph*, 19 October

“[Her] pragmatism, allied to her famous determination, is inspiring. Lots of people have underestimated her: more so than. She is formidable once she is confident that she has found the right solution to a given problem.” – *Daniel Johnson*, *Daily Mail*, 7 September

“The radical PM we need for this crisis.” – *Sun front page*, 6 September

“After the historic fiasco of Liz Truss’s fleeting but disastrous premiership, Britain is in dire need of genuine leadership and stability.” – *Sun editorial*, 21 October

“Don’t be fooled by the doom mongers – this is how YOU will benefit from the Trussonomics tax revolution.” – *Trevor Kavanagh*, *Sun*, 25 September

“Memo to the Left: Britain is not an embarrassing political and economic failure.” – *Trevor Kavanagh*, *Sun*, 9 October

“PM Liz Truss is like a dead parrot nailed to her perch by terrified Tory MPs.” – *Trevor Kavanagh*, *Sun*, 14 October

“Why you shouldn’t write off Liz Truss just yet.” – *Christopher Hope*, *Telegraph*, 20 October, 9.48am

“BREAKING Liz Truss is to resign, a senior Number 10 source has told me.” – *Christopher Hope*, *Twitter*, 20 October, 1.32pm

“Cometh the hour, cometh the man: a profile of Boris Johnson.” – *Toby Young*, *Quilllette*, 23 July 2019

“I’ll admit it: I was wrong to back Boris.” – *Toby Young*, *Spectator*, 19 September 2020
“It’s got to be Boris.” – *Toby Young*, *Daily Sceptic*, 20 October 2022

LORD OFF THE MAIL

LAST Tuesday, on the day Rishi Sunak became prime minister, the *Daily Mail* gave much of page 3 to a column by former Tory treasurer Lord Ashcroft. Although the new PM “faces a daunting array of challenges”, he wrote, “I do not think that Sunak will fear it. It is obvious that he can keep a cool head.”

After more such banalities, the piece ended with the author’s CV: “Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. For

information on his work, visit www.lordashcroft.com. Follow him on Twitter and/or Facebook @LordAshcroft.” There was also a plug for Biteback, the publishing company he owns.

Readers of the *Mail* titles are becoming weary familiar with Ashcroft, who has made almost 50 appearances in the papers in the past year. When not offering political observations he often writes 2,000-word features about military heroism, describing himself “as the author of seven books on courage and as a collector of gallantry medals”. But he is also crowbarred into news stories.

“Ashcroft’s boost for Kyiv athletes,” the *Mail on Sunday* whooped on 21 August, revealing that veterans charity Bravo Victor “has received a generous donation from Lord Ashcroft that let Ukrainian athletes train in Britain ahead of this year’s Warrior Games”. On 14 September came another excuse to magnify his holy name. As chairman of Crimestoppers, the *Daily Mail* reported, Lord Ashcroft “today pledges a £50,000 reward to help in the hunt for the killer of nine-year-old Olivia Pratt-Korbell”. From then on its updates on the murder inquiry regularly reminded readers of Lord A’s role. On 16 September, when describing how Olivia’s mother “said a poignant farewell to her daughter at a packed funeral yesterday”, it

was the *Mail* that reported, Lord

Ashcroft “today pledges a £50,000 reward to help in the hunt for the killer of nine-year-old Olivia Pratt-Korbell”. From then on its updates on the murder inquiry regularly reminded readers of Lord A’s role. On 16 September, when describing how Olivia’s mother “said a poignant farewell to her daughter at a packed funeral yesterday”, it

couldn’t resist adding: “This week Tory peer

Lord Ashcroft offered a £50,000 reward...”

In the same day’s *Mail* he achieved a double whammy by appearing in another news story, about recipients of the Victoria Cross and the George Cross being invited to the Queen’s funeral: “Businessman Lord Ashcroft, who owns more than 200 VC medals, said: ‘These individuals are the bravest of the brave and it is entirely appropriate they are honoured in this special way’.”

Eight days later he turned up in the *Daily Mail*’s front-page story celebrating the new era of Trussonomics: “Former Tory treasurer Lord Ashcroft said: ‘Some will applaud, others will of course condemn, but after the mini-Budget today and other measures this week the UK seems after 12 years to have a Conservative government’”,

Although the *Mail* often describes him as an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster, there’s one detail it never mentions: he’s also the moneybags who has bankrolled the business career of one 35-year-old Alex Dacre – whose dad, Paul, is editor-in-chief of *Mail* publisher DMG Media.

As reported in *Eye* 1575, Dacre Jnr got his first job at Restore, an office relocation firm in which Ashcroft had a 44 percent stake, before moving to Ashcroft’s Impellam Group. In 2015 Ashcroft backed him in a new venture, Marlowe plc, an outsourcing firm which has expanded through such a dizzying spree of acquisitions that Alex Dacre is now a director of more than 100 subsidiary companies.

Ashcroft, Marlowe’s largest investor by far, has a stake valued at £96m on last Thursday’s closing prices. Meanwhile, thanks to his lordship’s backing, Alex Dacre is sitting on shares worth almost £40m. Is it any wonder *Mail* titles are so eager to fawn over Ashcroft at every opportunity?

PRESSED FOR CASH

HARD times at the huge Press Association news agency, which is earning a reputation among staff as a skinflint.

Responding to Covid in April 2020, the firm announced that those earning less than £50,000 would take a 10 percent cut for at least a couple of months, and anyone earning up to £100,000 would see their pay cut by 15 percent. Senior managers said they would take an even bigger cut of 30 percent, though for just three months, after which pay mushroomed again.

Fast forward to this September, and after years of belt-tightening PA staff sent editor-in-chief Pete Clifton a request for an inflation-linked rise. Not long ago they got their reply: a rise of 6 percent – better than many workplaces, of course, but still a real-terms cut – plus a one-off “cost of living” payment of £350 for

anyone at PA earning less than £30,000 a year.

The median salary in the UK is £38,000 – yet 45 percent of the PA workforce still earned little enough to qualify for the one-off payment. When staff queried their low pay rates, management told them all salaries at PA are benchmarked against other companies – although it declined to tell them which other companies.

One pay packet that has made a healthy recovery is that of the highest-paid director at PA, whose identity is not released in the latest financial documents but who seems likely to be Clive Marshall, PA’s chief executive. Between 2020 and 2021, the latest accounts available show that the highest-paid director took a mere 3.3 percent salary rise (from £651,000 to £673,000) but that director’s bonus rose from £289,000 to a magnificent £562,000. All in all, a 31 percent pay increase to a thumping £1,235,000. Trebles all round! Well, not *all* round...

STATUS WOE

“**W**HAT is it like to lose the status of a top job?” asked the *Guardian* on 25 October. “After just 45 days as prime minister, Liz Truss has abruptly lost power. How have others such as Lib Dem leader Vince Cable and *Vogue* editor Alexandra Shulman coped with life after a high-level role – and can they offer any advice?”

One other figure the *Guardian* could have asked – but didn’t – is its own former chief executive, Amnette Thomas, who, it announced last summer, had “decided to leave the company” after a mere 15 months in charge. Her entire period at the top was dominated by a feud with editor Kath Viner, who strongly resisted Thomas’s attempts to encroach on her journalistic fiefdom and try to run the paper on a

more commercial basis, such things being against the *Guardian*’s principles.

Although the £600,000 payoff Thomas received will no doubt have helped soften the blow, Viner pointedly declined to pay tribute to her when Thomas’s departure was announced – a sharp contrast to the praise heaped on predecessor David Pemsel when he left in 2019, saying working with him had been “a lot of fun. Despite the many tough decisions we’ve had to take, David has always understood the integral place of *Guardian* and *Observer* journalism in our business.”

Alas, Pemsel then had to step down from his next job, running the Premier League, before he’d even started thanks to the *Sun* running a splash story about his sex life (for which it later apologised). Maybe he would have made a good case study too?

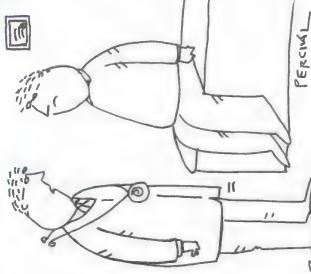


Starting with a lie

NOVEMBER's prime minister, Rishi Sunak, is avoiding the general election most UK citizens want by promising to deliver the 2019 Conservative manifesto, even though he knows he won't succeed.

Boris Johnson inherited the longest ever waiting lists and NHS and social care vacancies after nine years of the, er, Conservatives, with the threat of Brexit already making vacancies harder to fill. There were also worrying reductions in the life expectancy of the poorest women, likely due to the effects of austerity cuts on social services. And we were very poorly prepared for the threat of a pandemic. Much of this happened on the watch of the longest-serving health secretary, Jeremy Hunt (now chancellor). Undeterred, Johnson made some very bold promises on health that were never likely to succeed, even without Covid, war in Ukraine, a cost-of-living crisis and market meltdown.

Sunak, Hunt and the latest health secretary Steve Barclay now have no chance of "delivering the 2019 mandate", and they know it. They are starting in the style of Johnson and Liz Truss, with a massive lie.



learning disabilities and autism to be discharged from hospital and improve how they are treated in law."

10. "We will treat mental health with the same urgency as physical health. We will legislate so that patients suffering from mental health conditions, including anxiety or depression, have greater control over their treatment and receive the dignity and respect they deserve."

11. "We will develop new treatments for serious diseases, so that doctors can use the most advanced, life-saving treatments for conditions such as cancer or autoimmune disease, or for children with other rare diseases. If you or a loved one is unlucky enough to fall ill, we'll ensure you have access to the best available medicines. We will also improve the early diagnosis and treatment of all major conditions."

Whistleblowing in the wind

WITH Sunak banking his future on delivering the impossible, pressure will pass down the line to NHS managers to keep staff quiet about how bad the situation is. So who will protect brave NHS whistleblowers?

In his first brief stint as health secretary, Steve Barclay adopted an abrasive style, summoning chief executives of the six worst-performing trusts for ambulance handover delays to "ensure accountability" for addressing the issue (ie sort your own shit out and don't pass the buck on to the government).

Such an aggressive approach rarely delivers results in the NHS, as a younger Barclay might remember. As a newly elected MP, he was instrumental in getting the Department of Health to own up to the widespread use of gagging orders and payoffs to silence NHS whistleblowers, and he subsequently campaigned to stop them. In 2012 he applied for a parliamentary debate and a vote on the issue, saying: "Members of clinical staff are being silenced from raising issues, which, if acted upon, could save lives." Will Barclay now listen to whistleblowers to save lives or try to silence them to save Sunak?

Hunting horn

IRONICALLY the most high-profile whistleblower on failures in health and social care since the last general election has been Jeremy Hunt. As health secretary between 2012 and 2018, he oversaw a demise in the NHS and enforced a contract on junior doctors before leaving the job having at least secured a decent financial settlement for the NHS.

As subsequent chair of the health and social care committee, Hunt was doubtless horrified that the extra money had not delivered. He oversaw numerous excoriating reports on the state of the NHS and social care, and one that declared the handling of the pandemic to be "one of the most important public health failures the United Kingdom has ever experienced". Hunt regularly backed up these criticisms in the press and social media.

On 4 August he wrote in the *Telegraph*: "We must act right now to ensure the survival of the NHS. If the health service continues its current spiral of decline, we will see avoidable deaths mount up this winter. "We now spend around the same proportion of GDP on health as France and Germany, by some measures even more. Yet both countries have many more doctors per head than we do, because we have still not put in place a workforce plan that recognises that it takes seven years to

train a doctor – so you have to think ahead. "My select committee has been banging on about this for two years now, but have met delay, obfuscation and resistance from the Department of Health, which is still not committed to publishing a simple piece of analysis: how many doctors, nurses and health professionals will we need in five, 10 and 20 years' time, and are we training enough of them?"

"Right now, staff shortages mean morale on the front line is at rock bottom. The NHS is bleeding highly qualified clinicians and unfilled vacancies are crippling every specialty, from GPs to mental health to social care. If the NHS continues its current spiral of decline – with ambulances, A&Es and general practice all in rapidly deteriorating states of crisis – we will see avoidable deaths mount up this winter. Staff know there is no silver bullet – but why at the very least can't we give them the hope of knowing there is a long-term plan in place to address these shortages?"

Will Barclay now announce the long-term, costed staffing plan that Hunt argues is so essential for NHS survival? And will chancellor Hunt provide the money to implement it? On 4 August Twitter thread, Hunt also argued for:

1. "A mass overseas recruitment drive for doctors & nurses as a temporary, short-term lever – allowing drs from countries with good medical education systems like Canada and Germany to be green listed so they don't have to sit pointless additional exams."

2. "Grant an immediate exemption for doctors to public sector pension rules which are currently forcing them to retire in their fifties in alarming numbers."

3. "Make flexible working automatic across the NHS so we don't drive staff with young families to become locums or agency nurses, which is often the only way they can juggle work and home life."

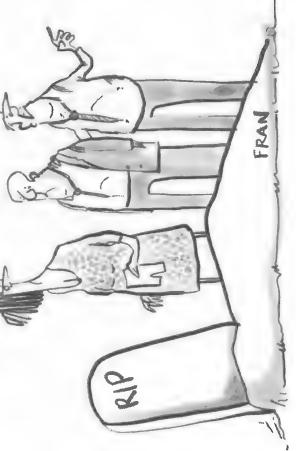
4. "Ditch the Stalinist centralism that has given the NHS more targets than any healthcare system in the world: replace national targets with easily accessible data that allows every one to compare performance (CQC Ofsted style ratings work well)."

5. "Move back to the system where everyone has their own GP rather than just being attached to a surgery. A study showed a 25% cut in mortality & 30% drop in hospital visits for people who saw the same GP (keeping our promise to recruit 6,000 more GPs will help achieve this)."

6. "Hospitals are full of people who can't act

right now," he concluded.

The latest version of Hunt ("eyewatering cuts await") needs to listen to its recent predecessor if we are going to make any headway in reducing the avoidable deaths this winter and improving the NHS by the time of the next election.



5. "We will make the NHS the best place in the world to give birth through personalised, high-quality support."

6. "We'll uphold our commitment to extend healthy life expectancy by five years by 2035."

7. "We will improve NHS performance, to bring down operating waiting times, improve A&E performance and increase cancer survival rates,"

8. "We will support our precious hospices to support 200,000 people at the end of their lives."

9. "We will make it easier for people with



NUMBER CRUNCHING

102 MP backers Boris Johnson claimed to have in Tory leadership contest, despite definite evidence of only 58

6 Children Boris Johnson has publicly claimed as his, despite definite evidence of more

BRAVO BRAVERMAN

AMID demands for a full inquiry into the extent of the home secretary's "multiple and serious" security breaches and criticism over squalid conditions at Manston asylum processing centre, it has emerged that Suella Braverman has yet another major problem, as the Bar Standards Board (BSB) is quietly looking into a separate matter.

One of her learned friends has complained to the barristers' regulator that she made a "dishonest statement out of self-interest to promote her career". It relates to revelations first made in the *Eye* in 2020 after the arch-Brexit MP for Fareham rose from relative legal obscurity to be Boris Johnson's attorney general.

Eye 15/16 showed how she had puffed up her credentials to make the world believe she had a stellar legal CV. That included claiming on her No 5 Chambers website she had "contributed" to Philip Kolvin KC's arcane but authoritative text book, *Gambling for Local Authorities, Licensing, Planning and Regeneration*. In reality she was his gofer. Her claim has since been removed but remains available on the Wayback web archive.

The tale surfaced again in *Big Issue* magazine last month following Braverman's promotion to home secretary by Liz Truss in September. Kolvin was quoted as saying: "Braverman had made no written or editorial contribution. He added: "However, on one occasion I asked her to do some photocopying for the book, which she did."

That triggered the complaint to the BSB. But the regulator might also consider earlier self-publicity. Her MP's website previously asserted that as part of the treasury counsel panel between 2010 and 2015, Braverman was involved "in the lengthy Guantánamo Bay Inquiry into the treatment of detainees by US and UK forces". Her name does not appear in Sir Peter Gibson's report, nor in the index of government players or lawyers. But perhaps she was one of the "80 lawyers and officials" reported by the BBC to have been asked to wade through 500,000 documents. The Westlaw legal research service's list of cases merely recorded Braverman fighting planning, customs and immigration actions between 2009 and 2014.

MAD NADHIM

HAVING served just 63 days as chancellor before being sacked in favour of Kwasi Kwarteng, it might be thought Nadhim Zahawi had been made to look ridiculous

enough. That would be to reckon without him managing a mere 49 days in his next job as chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster before being demoted by Rishi Sunak to minister without portfolio - and an even faster humiliation courtesy of the Sunday night shift at the *Telegraph* and his own shamelessness.

That chronology in full: at 9pm on Sunday 23 October, the *Telegraph* published a piece by Zahawi supporting Boris Johnson's return to Downing Street. Glossing over the fact its author had been in office under Johnson for less than 48 hours before publicly calling on his boss to resign, it hailed him as "a reinvigorated man. This summer as chancellor of the exchequer, I saw Boris 2.0 emerging. After that undeniably difficult time, he was genuinely contrite and

to let people know he resigned after the royal overruled his advice *not to* give an interview to the BBC's *Newsnight*.

Stein's period at the palace has now been excised from his online CV on LinkedIn, which features instead a mysterious gap in the autumn of 2019. It remains to be seen if his latest job, still optimistically listed last week as "special adviser to the prime minister, 10 Downing Street, September 2022-present", will vanish the same way. But in the meantime Stein has been busy pressing for a return to his former position with Roland Rudd's PR firm FGS Global - and persuading another former employer, Amber Rudd, who he worked for at the DWP in 2018-19, to put in a good word for him with her brother.

SNAKE'S LADDER

SO. FAREWELL then Simon Clarke, sacked after just 49 days as levelling up and housing secretary... and hello again, Michael Gove, back as housing secretary just 111 days after Boris Johnson sacked him and Downing Street sources called him a "snake".

He returns to a sight of relief from many awaiting key decisions from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). His previous spell in the job lasted over nine months making him a veteran by recent standards. Leaseholders affected by the building safety crisis will welcome him back thanks to his success in forcing developers to pay to fix their blocks. Private renters will feel more confident the government will deliver on its manifesto commitment to abolish Section 21 no-fault evictions after two reverse ferrets under Liz Truss. And groups campaigning for more social housing will be reassured by his statements supporting the tenure.

But fresh hazards have arisen since the last time Gove was at DLUHC. The autumn statement on 17 November could squeeze budgets for affordable housing, fire safety and levelling up that have already been eroded by inflation. And new PM Rishi Sunak seems less keen on social housing, too - during the leadership race he praised Gove's predecessor Robert Jenrick for starting to shift the affordable housing budget in favour of home ownership as Conservatives "believe in home ownership, not just keeping people in rented social accommodation".

Having dumped Jenrick's planning reforms amid a backbench rebellion last time he was at DLUHC, Gove now inherits Clarke's plans - currently on hold - to liberalise planning and environmental regulations in investment zones that seem designed to avoid Tory seats. Finally, there's the trip hazard - sorry, the 2019 manifesto target - of 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s. With battles ahead on funding and policy, this also looks set to be missed and quietly forgotten.

SKIDDING NO ONE

"Initially, I had backed Rishi Sunak during the MPs' stage of the contest. Yet over the past few weeks, I have grown increasingly concerned by his campaign's consistently changing position, especially on the economy, to chase votes... Above all, we need a leader who will unite the party. Liz Truss has demonstrated that she has the leadership and personal ability to bring us all together." - *Chris Skidmore MP*

Mail, 10 August

"Many congratulations to @RishiSunak on winning the Conservative leadership and becoming our next PM. As a party and as MPs we must all now unite together around his leadership in the national interest." - *Skidmore rediscovered Sunak's unifying potential on Twitter, 25 October*



CALLED TO ORDER

CALLS are sometimes heard for Westminster committees to have the power to compel witnesses to attend. What about first compelling MPs to turn up to their own meetings? Truancy is widespread.

The health select committee scored a bonny 87 percent attendance and culture a creditable 74.4 percent for the most recent period, although Tory MP Simon Jupp (East Devon) missed nearly half the culture select committee's meetings. At the other end of the pile the Scottish affairs committee scored 56.6 percent attendance levels. Alberto Costa (Con, S Leics) and Jon Cruddas (Lab, Dagenham) looking in on just one in nine meetings while Mhairi Black (SNP, Paisley) limped into a mere third. Absenteeism was even more rife at Welsh affairs, which struggled to break the 50 percent mark.

The women and equalities committee, despite the Enver Hoxha-like grip of its chair Caroline Nokes, clocked up 59 percent attendance, narrowly missing the 60 percent target set by parliament a few years ago. Three Tories (Lee Anderson, Theo Clarke and Philip Davies) and one Labour MP (Pontypridd's Alex Davies-Jones) missed more than half the meetings.

Labour MPs have been notoriously bad at attending the European scrutiny committee, seemingly because they feel it's too Brexit-y

Since her return to the Lords in 2012, she has continued to swan about, even though fellow peers snub her and turn their heads during her speeches. Uddin has now helped set up an all-party parliamentary group on "the Metaverse and Web 3.0", which she is chairing. The group's secretarial services are being provided by UKIC Accelerator, which has connections to the Chinese government. Its co-founder, Ivy Liu, boasts on her website of being supported by the Chinese consulate general in Manchester, scene of the recent violent suppression of Hong Kong freedom protests.

Few parliamentarians want much to do with the Chinese government at present, but what would Uddin care about that?

FEW ministers radiate arrogance quite as much as Andrew Griffith, the sometime Sky TV chief financial officer who has been kept at the Treasury by Rishi Sunak.

When Labour frontbencher Pat McFadden mentioned the explosion at Creeslough in Ireland during a debate on 11 October, Griffith breezily replied: "I add my comments and thoughts on the incident in County Down." Wrong county. Wrong country, too. Creeslough – as McFadden had said – is in Donegal (Republic of Ireland), not Down (Northern Ireland).

Coronation

GROUP STINK

REBUKED for making an over-lengthy speech in the House of Lords, former Labour peer Lady Uddin (now non-affiliated) said she "appreciated the leniency of the house" in letting her ramble on for so long. A lenient house, indeed. In 2009 Uddin was found to have claimed more than £100,000 for a flat she did not inhabit.

After "careful scrutiny" the director of public prosecutions, a certain Keir Starmer, decided not to bring charges against her, but the Lords privileges committee found she had acted "in bad faith" and demanded she repay a record-breaking £125,000 in wrongly trousered monies. Uddin was suspended from parliament for 19 months. Many peers wanted her gone for good, but there was no mechanism for a permanent expulsion.

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NUMBER CRUNCHING

38 days Time served by Kwasi Kwarteng as chancellor, one of four this year so far

2 days Time served by Michelle Donelan as education secretary, one of five this year so far

4 Prime ministers since Theresa May promised 'strong and stable' government in 2017 election

SHADOW PUPPET



IN HIS September newsletter, the chairman

of St Georges Conservative Club in Northampton complained vociferously that local MP Michael Ellis had failed to pay the rent on his constituency office despite reminders – a fact duly noted in *Eye 1581. Now Number 10 and club chairman John Burrows have written to the Eye to say this was incorrect.*

Burrows said: "Mr Ellis has been paying his non-payment before publishing the original story, he did not respond. Perhaps the MP was busy adapting to his change in circumstances? He moved from his job as paymaster-general in early September to become attorney-general under Liz Truss, before returning to the backbenches last week when Rishi Sunak entered Number 10.

U R B A N M Y T H

IT HAS somehow passed unnoticed that, as he chose to home in on the integrity question at Rishi Sunak's first PMQs last week, Labour leader Keir Starmer completely reinvented a tale about the PM to suit the out-of-touch-banker attack line.

"Over the summer," related Starmer to excitement from the Labour benches, "he was secretly recorded at a garden party in Tunbridge Wells, boasting to a group of Tory members that he personally moved money away from deprived areas to wealthy places instead."

The so-called "garden party" was in fact a stump speech to local Tory voters in the leadership election contest. The video of this chancellor, changed formulars "that showed all the funding into deprived urban areas" (his emphasis), the point, as Sunak's emphasis implied, was to redirect funds to deprived rural areas. Not quite the same thing...

under chairman Sir Bill Cash. At the foreign affairs committee, one of the more elusive members was Alicia Kearns (Con, Rutland & Melton), who has just become its new chair. Presumably she will in future do better than her former 62.5 percent attendance. At public accounts, which is Westminster's busiest committee, Barry Gardiner (Lab, Brent North) could only make 7.7 percent of its meetings when he was a member. Gareth Bacon (Con, Orpington) managed 20 percent.

The idlers of the arms exports control committee held just one public meeting in the past year. Seven of its 13 members attended. Gavin Robinson (DUP, Belfast East) was on parade for 43 percent of the defence committee's meetings. Rachel Hopkins (Lab, Luton South) was present at just 40 percent of the public administration committee hearings.

It should be conceded that absence is sometimes unavoidable owing to ill health or diary clashes. Even so, some MPs scored a remarkable *nil points*. Attendance records of precisely 0 percent were achieved at justice by Diane Abbott (Lab, Hackney N) and Kate Hollern (Lab, Blackburn), at Scottish affairs by Liz Twist (Lab, Blaydon), foreign affairs by Andrew Rosindell (Con, Romford), and at Welsh affairs by Virginia Crosbie (Con, Anglesey) and Tonia Antoniazzi (Lab, Gower). Missed every single meeting, the lot of 'em. Oh well, consistency is meant to be a good thing in politics. 'Gavel Basher'

In a further sign of corporate lobbyists' growing interest in Labour, Anneliese Dodds MP (pictured right) has become the latest shadow cabinet member to forget her former hostility and accept a corporate influence peddler "on secondment" to help run her office.

According to Dodds' latest entry on the register of MPs' interests, the Labour party chair and shadow secretary for women and equalities accepted the donation of a member of staff from September until next March, valued at £55,800, from corporate lobbyists Weber Shandwick, shadow business secretary Jonathan Reynolds has also allowed lobbyist Lowick Group to donate a member of staff to help run his office (see last *Eye*).

Dodds, a "soft left" member of Keir

Starmer's shadow cabinet, was previously an outspoken critic of corporate lobbying, trumpeting Labour's proposal last year to "force a vote to ban MPs from paid consultancies and directorships" and change lobbying rules to "end corruption in our parliament". But apparently this concern about corporate influence doesn't extend to barring lobbyists from donating members of staff to MPs.

Last year Dodds also demanded to know if well-connected Hawthorn Advisors, partly

owned by then-Tory chair Ben Elliot, had

entered "the corridors of power and what it used

that access to lobby for". But Weber Shandwick, which has been so generous as regards Dodds' office, also seeks to "change legislation" on behalf of clients.

The firm recently advertised for a recruit with "experience in government" who would "feel comfortable utilising your networks" for its client list – which includes serial privatiser Serco, offshore finance lobbying group British Virgin Islands Finance, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp and the oil lobbyist Offshore Energies UK.

More HP over 

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE decision of European diplomats to approve the UK's application to join the EU project on military mobility is a triumph of pragmatism over rhetoric. It will be formalised without debate at the next meeting of the bloc's foreign and defence ministers in mid-November.

Only the most wild-eyed eurosceptic would say this project, which aims to ease bureaucratic procedures slowing troop deployments, amounts to a joint military force. But the new initiative is unlikely to stand alone. The UK and the US are already training Ukrainian forces on EU soil and are likely to play some part in the EU's planned military assistance mission for Ukraine. Rishi Sunak's government will try to do this without any media fanfare to avoid riling hardline Brexiteers. The desire of successive Tory prime ministers to appease the European Research Group ensured that chapters on defence and security co-operation were never going to be part of the post-Brexit trade and cooperation agreement, and the Johnson government's allergy to all things Brussels meant last year's Integrated Review of Security,

BREXIT DIVIDEND

LIFE after losing elections is looking up for former UKipper-cum-Brexit party leader Nigel Farage: his blend of questionable financial advice and toxic opinion commands top dollar to judge by his personal service company's results.

In the year to May this year, Thorn In The Side Ltd, which receives much of Farage's income, increased its financial wealth from £667,000 to £1.15m, making £480,000 profit – and that's after whatever Farage extracted as wages or dividends. This is comfortably the best year since he set up the company more than a decade ago, and may be down to a few months presenting on GB News as well as some questionable financial advisory sidelines (see *Eye* 1567).

With all this earning power ultimately down to the profile Farage acquired through Brexit, Nige might be more generous to the organisation that got him where he is today and of which he

remains a director. Renamed from The Brexit Party Ltd to Reform Party UK Ltd, it is reduced to campaigning on matters such as climate change denial and is as much in the financial doldrums as Farage's outfit is in the pink.

Reform Party UK Ltd's accounts show it lost more than £800,000 last year, was technically insolvent and depended on loans from its backer and public face, Richard Tice. Donations above the £7,500 reporting threshold fell 90 percent on the previous year and are unlikely to be salvaged by what Tice last week called "many many [sic] hundreds of new members signing up to joining @reformparty_uk". As *Eye* 1578 revealed, the party also recently faced a winding up petition over a refusal to pay a bill going back to the 2019 general election.

The *Eye* understands it is reluctantly stumping up, and now staggers on thanks to Tice's desire to remain in the limelight (surely "to provide a challenging corrective to the prevailing political orthodoxy"? *Ed.*)

of residents being raped and sexually harassed by landlords under threat of eviction; of survivors of domestic abuse being placed in mixed-sex accommodation or with former perpetrators of violent crime; of former drug addicts being housed with users; and "support" being charged to the taxpayer that might actually amount to little more than a loaf of bread left on a table.

Yet the report shows there are problems well beyond Birmingham. In Devon, a council reported a portfolio of 12 properties that was sold to a special purpose vehicle for £6m and then sold on the same day to an offshore investment company for £18m on the basis of the profits that could be made from increasing the rents to exempt levels over the period of a 25-year lease. Even where the support comes from reputable providers, the high rents effectively trapped residents and left them unable to work because they would lose their housing benefit. The sector is overseen by multiple regulators, but some providers are unregulated and local authorities have limited powers to intervene.

According to the MPs, the government does not know how many people live in exempt accommodation – some estimate around 160,000 – or how much it costs taxpayers, with figures as high as £2bn a year quoted even before recent growth in the sector. As committee chair Clive Betts put it, government must "get a grip on the vast sums it is paying out without effective oversight".

Defence, Development and Foreign Policy contained only one reference to UK-EU cooperation on defence in 111 pages. But this is not the first time UK ministerial claims that "defence is for Nato not the EU" have been quietly unpicked. Officials in Whitehall have always wanted the UK to be either close to or actively involved in EU-coordinated military and defence projects, including the so-called Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) framework of military projects covering everything from joint forces to procurement, and the European Defence Fund.

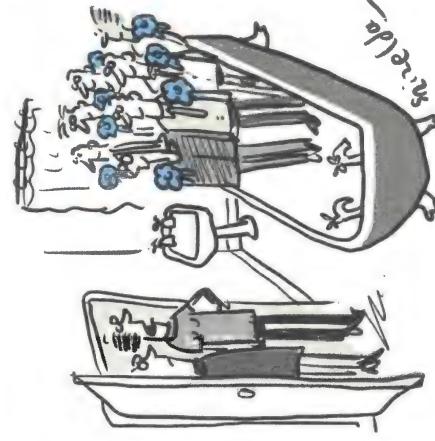
This has happened despite the bad blood caused by the Aukus defence pact between Australia, the US and UK – regarded by France's president Emmanuel Macron as a "stab in the back" – and the US's withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan last year, both of which were announced without warning by the Biden administration, much to the chagrin of the European Commission and France.

Indeed, the EU's sluggish reaction to Russia's invasion in February was, in part, because officials followed the principle of "twice bitten, thrice shy" and refused to believe US and UK intelligence warnings that the invasion was imminent.



"Hi honey – I'm Home Secretary again"

Illustration: Mark Knight



"We've had an absolute shower fitted in the bathroom"

Brexit opportunity

"Brexit has given us this opportunity to point out that Brexit was not a very good idea"



HOUSING NEWS

SPECIALIST accommodation for vulnerable people has become "a licence to print money" for unscrupulous providers including organised criminal gangs, with successive governments "caught sleeping" by a "gold rush" that is "all paid for by taxpayers through housing benefit", according to a damning report from MPs on the all-party housing committee.

Reporting "beyond disgraceful" living conditions that were actually making people's lives worse, the MPs were "shocked and alarmed" by what their inquiry into exempt accommodation found. This is housing for residents including care leavers, domestic abuse survivors, prison leavers and refugees that is exempt from local caps on housing benefit on the basis that support is also provided. In a report on the sector published last week, the MPs said there were many "good providers but as a whole the system was a 'complete mess'".

As the *Eye* has previously reported, problems are severe in Birmingham, where West Midlands Police says criminal gangs are making millions from exempt accommodation and using property as a front to launder money. The MPs heard stories



"Illustration: Mark Knight



"Like the home secretary, we've been given a second chance – to be deported to Rwanda"

Computer says don't go

THE shambolic way the rail industry sells train tickets is so convoluted it even manages to make standard tickets look less flexible or available than they actually are.

Many people simply want to know the price before deciding whether to go by train, but the official websites of National Rail Enquiries (NRE) and train firms put everyone through the palaver of selecting train times first. Prices then appear alongside the selected trains so the “anytime” or “off-peak” fares quoted seem to be specifically for those trains. In fact, anytime tickets are valid on any train and off-peak ones on any train outside the weekday hours defined as “peak”. Which other retailer makes its products look poorer value than they are?

Vending machines at stations traditionally sell tickets without needing train times up front, but some of the newest force people to select outward and return trains first – muddying validity and making transactions slower.

Online ticket retailing is especially dire in the north of England, where the rail enquires “no dog’s breakfast”. NRE often tell enquirers “no fares available for this journey” even though off-peak or anytime fares are available.

In a test enquiry for a weekend Huddersfield-Darlington trip (returning Sunday), NRE said: “No return fares available.” TransPennine Express’s website wrongly insisted: “This journey is not available for the [off-peak return] ticket you’ve selected.” London North Eastern Railway said anytime and off-peak singles or returns were “not available” on the Sunday. And Northern reckoned the Sunday trains were “sold out” – impossible on a railway where pre-booking isn’t mandatory.

Meanwhile Trainline (which charges booking fees and takes sales commission from taxpayers – see last *Eye* and “Ticky boohoo!” Letters, p24) also said trains were “sold out”. Presumably the industry is unsure what trains will run on Sundays, but instead of saying timetables aren’t finalised it spews out nonsense about ticket or seat availability.

The government knows the system is a shambles. In May 2021 it promised that the new Great British Railways would “simplify the



current confusing mass of tickets” and “be accountable for the ticketing and retail offer across the country”. Legislating for GBR is now delayed until “parliamentary time allows”; thus GBR won’t go live in 2024 and could yet be scuppered by private firms’ lobbying and Whitehall mandarins anxious to preserve the industry’s massive bureaucracy.

Meanwhile plenty could be achieved without GBR, such as scrapping train firms’ bespoke ticket-selling websites – multiplication that wastes taxpayers’ cash and confuses people. The best retailing experts could transfer to an authoritative official website which has a simple facility to look up fares and explains validity in plain English. Millions of pointless fares, the detritus of the failed rail-franchising experiment, could have been ditched by now (*Eyes passim*). Alas, the Department for Transport is unable or unwilling to improve the rail system’s efficiency and clarity to net more revenue and cut costs, thus the public-spending axe will have to fall where it harms passengers.

‘Dr B Ching’

ROAD RAGE

Transport of Deloitte

AUSTERITY 2.0 swing into operation some time ago on Britain’s buses. Services are being cut or cancelled as there’s too little public funding to cover rising costs and pay drivers a competitive wage, while ministers won’t recognise bus driving as a shortage occupation for visas. Happily though there’s still plenty of cash for expert advice on how services might be improved one day.

Last month it emerged that South Yorkshire bus cancellations had more than doubled in a year. The news came soon after the region’s combined authority agreed to appoint Deloitte to provide a secondee to help prepare for bus “franchises” – contracts to replace the failed free-for-all of 1980s bus deregulation (which applies to all of Britain except London).

The estimated cost for Deloitte’s secondee is £185,000 to £204,000, excluding expenses, for two days per week for a year. Without such help the region’s work on franchising would be put “at risk”. So local taxpayers will stump up around £1,900 for each day’s work (about 20



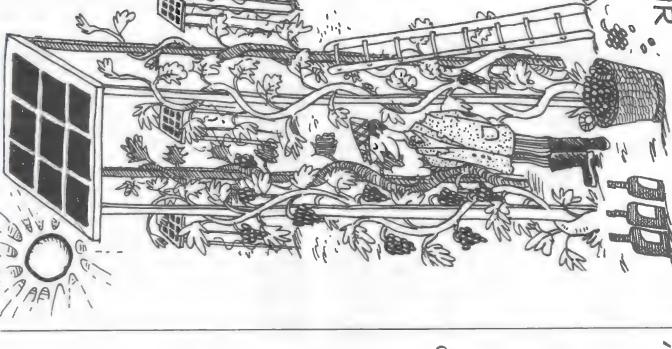
times a bus driver’s daily wage). Last summer South Yorkshire agreed to pay Deloitte £71,750 “to support development of the case for change for the bus franchising assessment”.

Greater Manchester has spent years and a shedload of cash preparing for franchising. At last it’s almost ready to award the first contracts but there’s no national template, so other combined authorities must jump through the same bureaucratic hoops themselves. South Yorkshire estimates its franchising assessment will cost £3m, then another £2m for the “next phase of activity”.

West Yorkshire decided last year to cough up an estimated £5m to £7m “to reach a point where a formal decision can be taken to make a franchising scheme” – a point due to be reached in January 2024. Last month West Yorkshire councillors were told that Arriva and FirstGroup had reduced services in early October, but around 11 percent of the region’s network remains financially unviable.

Tracy Brabin, West Yorkshire’s Labour mayor, finds it all “really frustrating”. So it is, as the drawbacks of bus deregulation were blindingly obvious when the last Labour government legislated in 2008 to permit areas to bring in “quality contracts” instead. But so enamoured was Labour of the private bus firms that it set the bar impossibly high. The Tories made a better fist of it in their 2017 bus legislation (hence Manchester’s breakthrough) but setting up bus franchising diverts money to Byzantine bureaucratic processes while poorly funded buses lose yet more passengers – passengers the eventual franchised buses will need if they’re to make ends meet.

‘Hedgehog’



farmgate prices for beef and lamb producers, and 29 percent faster for potato growers. This suggests significant further inflationary food price rises are likely.

What can the government do to reduce food price inflation and in particular the impact of food price rises on those on low incomes? There are structures in place, with statutory marketing boards for grain, oilseeds, pulses, beef and lamb (although, sadly, no longer for milk), so the government could intervene to put price caps on some commodities and compensate farmers for any lost revenue.

New prime minister Rishi Sunak was keen to “do whatever it takes” to help with the economic crisis caused by the pandemic when he was chancellor, devising schemes that cost taxpayers more than £350bn, including the “Eat Out to Help Out” scheme. Now he quickly needs to devise a way to help those on low incomes just to be able to eat in.

‘Bio-Waste Spreader’



The Agri Brigade



LATEST figures show inflation in the UK hit a 40-year high of 10.1 percent in September, driven by the biggest food price rises in decades. Can the government do anything to arrest these food price increases, which affect poorer families disproportionately and create all sort of headaches for the Bank of England in terms of raising interest rates?

Overall, food prices increased 14.6 percent over the past year, but the figure for staples such as chips, milk and biscuits is even higher at 17 percent, according to the Office for National Statistics. These increases should not have come as a surprise to economists, given the inflationary pressures farmers have been enduring for some time.

AF Agriculture, a co-operative based in Norwich and owned by 3,000 farmers which spends more than £250m a year buying fertiliser, agri-chemicals, fuel and

rapeseed and potato production show the highest increases in cost, at 40 percent, with dairy next, at 37 percent, and beef and lamb at 35 percent. AF does not produce input cost figures for pork or chicken but the picture here is likely to be even worse, given that farmers in these sectors buy large quantities of feed and use a lot of energy heating and ventilating buildings.

While food prices have risen in some farm sectors such as cereals and milk by enough to compensate farmers for increased production costs, in other sectors they have not. AF warns, for example, that input costs have risen 18 percent faster than

Channel 4 is lucky the two most recent Tory governments seem to have de-prioritised its privatisation, because this transmission vapourised any claim to public service.

The show alone probably ruled out C4 chief content officer Ian Katz from becoming a future director-general of the BBC, but he conclusively removed himself with another programme last week, which included the startling declaration that the initials BBC really stand for “big black cock”. The claim was made by a contributor to *My Massive Cock*, an example of what is known in the industry as a reverse asterisk show – newspapers and electronic programming guides will insert at least two stars in the title but the programme will be lucky to get one of them (out of five) for quality.

Introductory captions for the subjects show a name (Scott, Matt – but, inconveniently for the voice-over script, no Richard) and an erect penile

length: say, 9.5 inches. Of course may complain that

centimetres should have been used, but the

regulator will approve that the titular exhibits are only seen flaccid, except, in the case of an artist, for a plaster cast of his organ.

In a particularly shameless example of TV justifying sleazy content with a suggestion of educational intent, the doc pivoted to explore the “mental distress” that some of those wielding top-end

members suffered. One guy said he was sick of being known in his locality only for his trouser mound.

Yeah, so exposing and discussing his pelvic excess in peak-time is really going to help his rebranding?

Over on the network where BBC does not stand for racially enhanced genitalia, the centenary celebrations included a *Doctor Who* special featuring Jodie Whittaker’s final appearance. It’s probably a good time for the actress to go, because her mode of slightly pop-eyed positivity – insisting that, despite Daleks, Cybermen and the Master trying to destroy her and the world, everything will be fine – is now disturbingly reminiscent of a Liz Truss speech.

Outgoing showrunner Chris Chibnall added to the familiar tropes of a show in which the Doctor transitions to another actor a super-retro framework reflecting the 59 of the BBC’s 100 years that *Doctor Who* has spanned: almost all former assistants popped up and all 14 full-time Doctors were represented in some form, albeit Tom Baker only by his scarf.

The tenth doctor, David Tennant, unexpectedly turned out to be the next Doctor, signed for three specials before the previously announced Neutin Gaiwa becomes the 15th lead time lord next year. This twist may reflect ratings trouble in the Who universe, with returning showrunner Russell T Davies seeking a numbers boost before taking a risk on the next newbie.

‘Remote Controller’

MEDIA NEWS

WHO says the relationship between politicians and the Westminster media is incestuous?

Last week saw Rishi Sunak recruit Amber de Bottom from ITV News as his new director of communications. As home news editor, de Bottom worked on the series of Partygate scoops that did for Boris Johnson’s reputation, as well as precipitating the resignation of Downing Street spin-doctor Allegra Stratton – who in 2020 had been recruited by her close friend Rishi Sunak from the job of national editor at ITV News. Stratton had been poached from Sunak by Johnson, before her former colleagues at ITV obtained a video showing her joking about Covid rule-breaking in Number 10 and she tearfully quit. It all makes the congratulations offered in an internal ITV email by Paul Brand, the UK editor who fronted the Partygate stories, to de Bottom last week seem rather more pointed: “An enormous loss for us, but a huge gain for No10 who will now know all the tricks of our trade!”

THE suspension of Krishnan Guru-Murthy from Channel 4 News on 20 October set a high bar for hacks: if every journalist who has called a cabinet minister a “cunt” behind the scenes had to stand down, newsrooms would be empty indeed.

But the hoicking off air of BBC News channel presenter Martine Croxall four days later, after she admitted feeling “gleeful” at Boris Johnson’s withdrawal from the leadership race and how it might affect the front pages she was about to review, raised colleagues’ eyebrows even further. Croxall is now being investigated for a “potential breach of impartiality”, like presenters Emily Maitlis and Naga Munchetty before her.

Croxall’s comments received a grand total of 14 complaints upon broadcast – though, as is customary, frothing press coverage since has increased that to around 600, with a third of those specifically objecting to the BBC taking her off air. By contrast, when *Guardian* columnist Owen Jones encouraged his Twitter followers to complain about political correspondent Nick Eardley’s supposedly pro-Tory phrasing of remarks about austerity two days later, more than 2,000 responses flooded in to the BBC – resulting in no suspension and zero headlines.

Croxall herself has long been a champion of BBC women fighting for equal pay at the NUSJ. The union is consulting on strike action over the bitterly opposed merger of the News Channel, where Croxall works, and BBC World News, involving the loss of at least 70 jobs, including 14 presenters. No doubt this is coincidental. Several hundred of Croxall’s colleagues have sent a letter protesting at her treatment to new BBC News boss Deborah Turness. But her previous record at ITN is hardly inspiring. In February it was revealed that when Turness was in charge, several women employees of the ITN-made *Channel 4 News* involved in equal pay, discrimination and bullying cases had been obliged to sign non-disclosure agreements in return for a financial settlement.

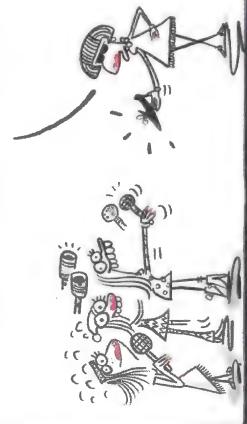
SUPERMODELS

KITTEN HEELS ARE BACK!!
BUT HAVEN’T KITTEN HEELS BEEN “BACK”
LOTS OF TIMES BEFORE ???



K E R B E R

YEAH THEY GOT q LIVES !!

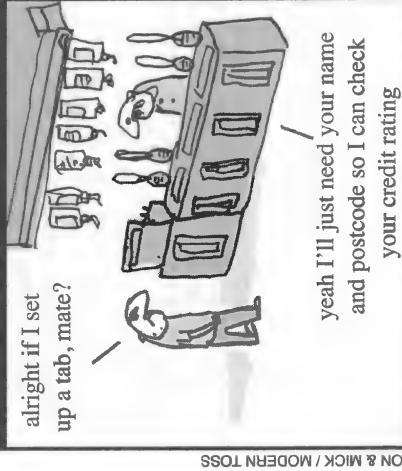


K E R B E R

- **DUMB BRITAIN** •
- *Tipping Point, ITV*
- Ben Shephard: Richard the Lionheart was king of England in which century?
- **Contestant: The 20th.**
- *The Chase, ITV*
- Walsh: Which TV Poirot received a knighthood in 2020?
- **Contestant: Hercule.**



DESPERATE BUSINESS



JON & MICK / MODERN TOSST

HEIR IN THE SOUP

THE tomato soup attack on Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* by Just Stop Oil protesters turns out to be a very circular affair.

After the protest, oil heiress Aileen Getty wrote in a *Guardian* op-ed piece: "I proudly provide funding to the Climate Emergency Fund." The fund, in turn, makes grants to climate activists including Just Stop Oil and its soup and mash throwers. Her personal donation to CEF has been reported to be almost £500,000.

Aileen's father, Jean Paul Getty II, donated a whopping £50m in 1985 to the National Gallery, home to, er, Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*. And the family connections don't end there. Aileen's brother Mark was formerly chair of the board of trustees at the National Gallery, and he and their uncle Gordon made their own donation of £10m. The queen awarded Mark Getty an honorary knighthood, partly in recognition of his leadership and support for the National Gallery.

The family's financial support made the building's East Wing project possible, and the Getty Entrance was named in honour of Aileen and Mark's father in 2004 – from where, coincidentally, it's a quick march upstairs to room 44, where the Van Gogh was targeted by Just Stop Oil.

● Coalition of chaos, p40

ANTI-SOCIAL MEDIA

IN THE wake of Meta's latest poor quarterly results – which last week saw the company's share price fall to just 30 percent of what it had been at the start of the year – it's worth examining one of the numbers in particular. The company's Reality Labs division – the part of the business focused on "building the metaverse" – has spent \$15bn on the project since the beginning of 2021, resulting in average quarterly revenues of less than \$30m, total user numbers estimated at 200,000, and a customer base that tends to "experience the metaverse" once and never return.

By way of comparison, the total development budget for the first iPhone, a piece of technology that revolutionised interactions with the digital world, was \$150m, while videogame Grand Theft Auto V, released in 2013, still attracts 1.5m-plus players a month to its virtual world and cost an estimated \$250m to develop. Maybe it's time to re-evaluate Mark Zuckerberg's status as a business visionary.

WITH the US midterm elections approaching, social media companies are again scrabbling to prevent their platforms being used to spread lies and disinformation. Meta is banning publication of new advertisements about social issues, elections, or politics in the US between 1 and 8 November, as well as preventing the editing of existing, approved ad campaigns during the period. But this might be too little too late.

A study by Global Witness of disinformation across social media in the run-up to the midterms found that swathes of adverts containing falsehoods and disinformation about US politics were approved by Meta for use on Facebook, despite promises in recent years of improved fact-checking for political materials. Still, at least it did better than TikTok, which approved 90 percent of all ads featuring "outright false and misleading election information", despite ostensibly not allowing any political ads on its platform whatsoever.

AS META loses its lustre across the western

world, TikTok's rise continues, with recent reports suggesting it is accelerating its ambitions to operate in the e-commerce space. In preparation for this, the platform has spent the past year developing its ad products for retail, meaning advertisers can now target shoppers based on whether a user has added an item to their online shopping cart or wishlist, the searches users make on a website, and whether they have clicked a particular button on a website, etc. Worth remembering that Meta isn't the only purveyor of predatory surveillance capitalism... .

With more delays and cancellations looming on the TransPennine Express, Northern, Avant West Coast and ScotRail, on 25 October BBC Radio 4's *Today* asked an expert to explain what could possibly have gone wrong for rail passengers.

Introduced as "an independent railway consultant who was formerly a director at Network Rail", Anna-Jane Hunter blamed the cancellations on "hangovers from the Covid period", "training backlog" and "industrial action". Perhaps so; but listeners might also have been interested to know that Hunter is married to one Chris Nutton, the major projects director at... TransPennine Express.

When the *Eye* asked Hunter about the potential for a conflict of interest, she told us she only declares her relationship for paid work.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

5.9m Weekly listeners to Radio 4's Today programme, a fall of 9%, to which the *Times* devoted a whole article about how 600,000 Today listeners tune out

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AD NAUSEAM

"STEP into the pension glow," coos a new ad on the sides of buses in the underground this week. "Get the charity of knowing where your pension is invested and how it's performing. Feel the glow with Nutmeg."

And why wouldn't one want to know where one's pension is invested in these times of volatile markets, dodgy business practices and opaque money trails. As such, in the spirit of full disclosure, the Nutmeg ad mentions in very small type that Nutmeg is, "a JP Morgan company." That would be the same JP Morgan which in 2020 was fined \$920m and admitted to wrongdoing to settle federal US market manipulation investigations. According to the settlement, between 2009 and 2016 the bank's traders placed orders on one side of the market they never intended to execute, to create a false impression of interest and raise or depress prices. It's known as "spoofing", aka the very opposite of that glowing clarity now promised by Nutmeg.

IT'S only the beginning of November, so it must be time for the John Lewis Christmas ad. For those who couldn't wait, however, the retail chain was already grinding the hype-mill on 27 October with an email offering people the chance to "be the first to watch our Christmas ad". All punters had to do was become a My John Lewis member and download the John Lewis app by 31 October. For handing John Lewis a festive stocking full of their personal data, members would then receive "an exclusive first watch on the morning of its launch".

MALGORITHM

Spain in English website: "Competition watchdog in Spain launches probe into Booking.com"

Accompanying ad: "Book your happy place with booking.com"

Milton Keynes Citizen: "Milton Keynes man found guilty of stabbing another man to death outside his home"

Accompanying ad: "This knife is extra sharp just like samurai swords"

(smartdealsguide.com)

WEIRD AND CREEPY

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● Coalition of chaos, p40

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

PROLONGED agony for arts

organisations who waited nervously to learn the outcome of their funding applications in the run-up to an expected announcement from Arts Council England on 26 October. It never came.

Instead, ACE said the process had been "paused" owing to the cabinet reshuffle (though the culture secretary remained in post). And in a lame non-apology likely to comfort no one, it added that "we feel for everyone" caught in limbo. ACE has already made clear it is heavily oversubscribed and many worthy applications will miss out. While the agony continues and arts organisations await the bad news, now rescheduled for 4 November, indications are that the sector could be facing a 20 percent or more cut in grant aid for 2023-26. Many fear they could go to the wall this time, among them several orchestras. London organisations in particular are worried they may be told to relocate far from the capital or get nothing. Yet ACE's entire budget for grants, at around £350m, is relatively small – tiny, even, when compared to the amount the arts sector as a whole contributes to the overall economy (£10.8bn a year, pre-Covid, including £2.8bn to the exchequer).

ENGLISH National Opera chief executive Stuart Murphy is to stand down after five years in the job – and not to everyone's dismay. Murphy's liking for PR tricks drew hostility from the serious press (on whom he then declared war), and he alienated various staff, some of whom left in consequence.

Amid the usual corporate camouflage of thanks, ENO board chairman Harry Brinjies called Murphy an "outstanding CEO in exceptional times" who leaves the company in "robust shape for future challenges". Murphy amplified the eulogies, claiming to have brought "calm and stability" to ENO and set it up with a future that has "never looked more secure and exciting". O'Boulez fears that, beyond the handful of people Murphy has around him, there won't be too many who agree with that analysis.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

ROTTEN BOROUGH\$

SHAKY FOUNDATION

LIVERPOOL has become the latest council, in the wake of Croydon and Cambridgeshire, to make a hash of running its own wholly owned housing company.

In 2018, elected mayor at the time, Joe Anderson set up Liverpool Foundation Homes with the promise to build 10,000 homes with an investment of £500m. The homeless, disabled, elderly and foster families would all benefit. Just four years on, the company has been put into liquidation and declared no longer a viable proposition. And what of those 10,000 new homes? The actual total built is... er, 18.

Another of the Labour council's broken promises is that of a training academy to help hundreds of young unemployed people find work. Seven years ago it spent £4m buying land earmarked for the academy – £3.5m of that being borrowed. Now, the *Liverpool Echo* reports, the council is selling the site but refuses to comment for “commercial reasons”.

Following last year’s damning report by government inspector Max Caller on how the authority was being run, the council called in procurement specialist 4C Associates to see how it could improve its handling of contracts. 4CA found “increased financial and commercial risk” from contracts that are “ineffectually managed”. After analysing £550m of contracts, 4CA found that up to £50m may have been lost. In 555 cases the council failed to follow its own rules governing how contracts are issued and managed. Cllr Andrew Makinson, deputy leader of the opposition Lib Dems, said: “Thus is a shocking record of failure... In some cases there may be innocent explanations, but many of these failures are due to incompetence and poor management, and there will have been many opportunities to hide fraud amongst this.”

● **THE Local Government Association’s guide to “inclusive” language, which suggested councils should ban the use of such controversial terms as “mother” and “father”, has been quietly withdrawn following tabloid outrage.** The 18-page guide was emailed to 339 district, county, metropolitan and unitary authorities in England, plus 22 Welsh councils by the LGA’s chief executive, Mark Lloyd. It caused predictable outrage in the *Torygraph, Sun* and *Mail*.

In stead of referring to parents’ gender, the LGA had advised council staff to use the term “birthing parent”. Other terms banned had included “expat”, “Caucasian”, “second generation”, “the homeless”, “economic migrant” and “deprived neighbourhoods”. It

also told council staff not to refer to “disabled” or “able bodied” colleagues.

The use of the “Ladies and gentlemen” welcome at the beginning of any council meeting was also deemed to be *verbotten* by the LGA’s language police. Instead, “Good afternoon, everyone” should be used, so that “people who are not ‘ladies’ or ‘gentlemen’ may recognise the difference, feel included and that they belong”. Within days of being described in headlines as “honkers” – probably not a word of which the LGA would approve – the association withdrew its guide.

LIST OF SHAME

THE last *Eve* featured three councillors from different parts of Britain who had been found guilty of violent offences yet were able to continue in office because none had received a custodial sentence of three months or more. To the brass-necked list can be added Tom Hollis, an independent councillor at both Nottinghamshire county and Ashfield district councils. He has been found guilty of harassment without violence and careless driving at separate trials.

In the harassment case, the court heard that Hollis had shouted abuse over the wall at his neighbours, with whom he had fallen out, then called 999 claiming he was being chased by a man with a knife. As the *Hucknall Dispatch* reported, the prosecution told magistrates Hollis “ran into his house, squealing, almost crying, shouting ‘don’t come at me with that’”. But CCTV showed that no one had gone anywhere near his house and Hollis had been making it up.

The following day he was found guilty of driving without due care and attention, having been spotted by police driving at speeds of around 60-70 mph in a 30mph zone.

He was given a 12-month community order and ordered to complete 200 hours of unpaid work. He will also have to pay his victims compensation of £500 each, costs of £1,000 and a fine of £570, with six points added to his driving licence.

Hollis will not have to dig too deep to find the money. In the last financial year he claimed £16,500 from Nottinghamshire CC and more than £19,100 from Ashfield DC. He also sits in the cabinet as the portfolio holder for housing, earning himself another special responsibility allowance. He may have appeared twice in court, but his political career has hardly been affected.

TREMBLING MADNESS

YORK city council’s embarrassment over disabled access to its refurbished Guildhall HQ continues (*Eve* *passim*). A protest against a ban on blue badge holders from parking in the city centre prompted Dawn Steel, the council’s head of civic and democratic services, to write to councillors

suggesting they might want to bypass the demo.

“We are offering you the opportunity to enter the meeting tomorrow night via the entrance next to the House of Trembling Madness,” wrote Steel – referring to a pub next door, rather than the Guildhall. Come the meeting, among those excluded from the chamber was Beth Moulam, a wheelchair user with cerebral palsy who has competed for Britain at the Paralympics but was told she could not be accommodated in her council’s public gallery.

The Lib Dem/Green coalition council knows very well that access is a problem in the council chamber. An accessibility audit, commissioned by the council and received in August, states that “the chamber is not fit for modern day life in terms of accessibility”. The report’s author, Ian Streets, wrote: “Largely due to its antique fixed seating, the Guildhall chamber does not offer inclusive or equitable access to the democratic process of City of York full council meetings... I believe that an alternative accessible venue should be used.”

SNOOPERS DOGGED

OFSTED inspectors have returned to Bristol to measure how far council officials have improved education for those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), four years after criticising “significant areas of weakness”.

The reinspection report, expected imminently, comes at an awkward time for the city council, following revelations that it carried out surveillance on allegedly “troublesome” parents of SEND children (*Eve* 1578).

The council has been forced to commission an external inquiry into the spying, after councillors rejected an internal report by the council’s own lawyers, who concluded there was “no evidence” of “systematic monitoring” of SEND parents’ social media accounts. Tory councillor Geoff Gollop said: “It doesn’t matter to me if that was systematic or random – it was wrong. Only an independent inquiry will tell us who was responsible for this.”

Leaked council documents, which prompted demands for the external inquiry, reveal staff sent senior officers detailed data on critical social media posts which alleged poor SEND provision.

In an email to education bosses, one official said she was “working hard to uncover concrete evidence”. This appeared to include trawling through personal photos from parents’ Facebook accounts and matching them to tweets.

Four years ago, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission found “significant areas of weakness” in Bristol’s SEND provision. Inspectors criticised five areas: a lack of accountability of education leaders; long delays and poor-quality education, health and care plans; underachievement by SEND pupils, with high rates of absenteeism and exclusions; a lack of engagement and fractured relationships between the council and parents and carers; and inconsistencies in how quickly and effectively SEND pupils were identified and assessed.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON



Letter from Rome from Our Own Correspondent



FIVE WORLD

THE rise to power of our new prime minister **Giorgia Meloni** and her far-right **Brothers of Italy** has been almost without trace.

Founded by Meloni in 2012, the party won between 2 and 6 percent of the vote in 2019 elections before surging to top September's general elections with 26 percent. However, it's overstretching the dough to suggest Italy has taken a major lurch to the right.

Most of our parties, on both left and right, are little more than vehicles for the personalities that created them. Just as Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia emerged in the early 90s after the *Tangentopoli* corruption scandal that brought down the entire political establishment, Meloni's party has simply cashed in on being the only significant party to have stayed out of Mario Draghi's technocrat government, and the two crisis-ridden governments led by Five Star Movement's Giuseppe Conte, during the pandemic.

With a motto of "God, country and family" (her late, estranged father was convicted of drug smuggling in Spain in the 1990s), Meloni's programme is the now familiar cocktail of populist contradictions. Her election promises ranged from classic conservative offers of cutting taxes and bureaucracy and increasing defence spending to dog-whistle pledges to close Italy's borders to protect the country from "Islamisation", renegotiate European treaties to return more power to Rome and fight "LGBT lobbies".

But she keeps very bad company. Her movement is still the successor party to the far-right Italian Social Movement, formed by supporters of Mussolini in 1946. Those of us old

enough to remember the *Anni di piombo* (Years of Lead) in the 60s, 70s and early 80s know the ISM was linked to a string of bomb attacks and assassinations.

Meloni's only government experience was three years as youth minister in Berlusconi's last administration. But her start to life in office has been an exercise in pragmatism. Having shared platforms with Hungarian strongman Viktor Orbán, Meloni's Euroscepticism appears to have vanished. Gone is the anti-EU rhetoric and calling for the euro to be scrapped. The nearly €200bn we will receive in grants and loans from the EU's post-Covid recovery fund is comfortably the most of any member state and equates to 200bn reasons to tone down the Brussels bashing.

Instead, it's her coalition partners – Matteo Salvini's Lega and Berlusconi's Forza Italia – and the two kingpins themselves who are the real walking liabilities.

While Meloni has promised to avoid "fiscal adventurism" – a nod to Liz Truss's failed economic experiment in Westminster – Salvini, now deputy prime minister and minister for infrastructure, has promised the government will lower the pension age, extend a flat tax and finally build a bridge between mainland Italy and Sicily, which he said would create 100,000 jobs.

Meanwhile, Meloni's promises of support and arms supplies for Ukraine have been somewhat undermined by the 20 bottles of vodka Berlusconi received as a sanctions-busting birthday gift from Vladimir Putin a few weeks ago, and video recordings of the Bunga-Bunga king praising his "true friend" in the Kremlin. Salvini is also a long-standing Putin ally. Though the octogenarian Berlusconi will not hold a formal job, his long-time ally and mouthpiece, former EU commissioner and European parliament president Antonio Tajani, is foreign minister.

Italians affect to be offended by jibes about the quick-fire turnover of our governments, and we have watched with wry amusement the Conservative party's attempts to match us. Even so, the prospects of this coalition of cranks and narcissists surviving for long are slim.

Postcard from Cairo



URR diminutive pharaoh, His excellency General Abdelfattah al-Sisi (pictured), is preparing to host COP27, the UN environment summit, between 6-18 November. In the attractive resort city of Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt is establishing its own Potemkin village by the sea, a monument to modernity and environmental responsibility.

Far from the smog of Cairo and the plastic-littered environs of the Nile Delta, delegates from around the world are preparing to descend on the Red Sea. Some 300 new gas and electric buses will ferry conference attendees around the pristine resort in comfort unknown to commuters in the capital who are still riding smoke-belching buckets from a bygone era. The conference organisers even say they will provide a designated "protest area" — you can imagine the mirth this elicited from our prison-hardened activists.

Suffice it to say, we are not expecting protestors. Sisi is a self-styled no-nonsense democrat. He swept to power via military coup in 2014 and has overseen the most repressive period of Egyptian history in recent memory. At last count, some 20,000 political prisoners – or just those in the wrong place at the wrong time – languished in Egypt's jails. This has been a welcome boost for the construction industry, which since 2011 has been commissioned to build 35 new jails.

Heading up the conference is foreign minister Sameh Shoukry, a stalwart Sisi appointee. The British delegation may recognise him as the man charged with justifying the detention of pro-democracy activist and UK national Alaa Abdel Fattah, who has been on hunger strike. The Italians might remember when Shoukry promised them his government would work to catch whoever tortured and executed student Giulio Regeni and left his body by the side of the road (all evidence suggests it was the security services).

Sisi hopes to use the summit to try to greenwash his administration's well-deserved reputation on human rights. In so doing, he risks diluting a much bigger (and more genuine) issue as to the balance of burden sharing when it comes to tackling the climate emergency. Egypt wants to put western accountability for the growth in carbon emissions (or lack thereof) at the top of the agenda.

In a pre-COP conference in Cairo in October, Egypt's special representative for the COP presidency spoke of the need for rich countries to meet their climate finance obligations to the global south. It is predominantly carbon emissions from Europe and the US that are "responsible for where we are right now", the representative said, calling the G20's failure to meet their \$100bn-a-year climate finance target "shameful".

On this issue, Egypt has the support of many other poor countries battling climate change. Particularly in the wake of the recent flooding in Pakistan and Nigeria, frustration across Africa and Asia towards rich countries' failure to meet their own targets on climate finance is palpable. Egypt is positioning itself as the voice of the global south, ready to speak truth to power at the Sharm summit.

It is an argument that made little real headway at the COP summit in Glasgow last year, and that was before the Ukraine war triggered steeping international energy and food prices. Egypt has been particularly hard hit, with inflation and devaluation. But it's not all bad news. Since the spring, European countries have been hoovering up contracts around the world to supply fossil fuels this winter – with Egypt's gas exporters among the main beneficiaries!

WEST BANK WATCH

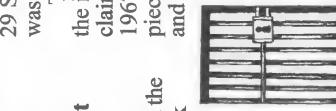
Yaser Suleiman, who died of unclear cause on 29 September while running from IDF soldiers, was only seven.

The backdrop to this misery is well known: the impasse of two nations with two perspectives claiming one land, occupied by Israel since 1967. Palestinians perceive an ongoing, piecemeal annexation of this, their homeland and identity. But Israel sees itself restoring historical Israel and protecting its people. The UN consistently condemns the occupation, most recently last month when its independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, issued a pointed reminder that 143 states (including Israel) had just stated that unilateral annexation of one state's territory by another violates international law. But Israel disputes the West Bank is another state's territory.

It is always tense, but after a series of terror attacks against Israelis in the spring, the IDF stepped up raids across the West Bank and tensions are higher than ever. Yet no tension, whoever started it, justifies a soldier shooting an unarmed child in the head without an honest accounting.

Nobody should hold Israel to moral standards not expected of others, but these are the standards expected of others. Nobody should prevent Israel defending those to whom it owes protection, but that included Adel Daoud. Nobody expects soldiers never to make mistakes, but everyone expects states to acknowledge them. Let's hope Israel's investigation into Adel's death is swift, transparent, just and, for once, independent.

Dr Grim'



AS Palestinians mourn six men killed on 25 October in Israeli raids on the West Bank city of Nablus, others mourn not men but boys.

On 7 October Adel Daoud, 14, was sitting with his friends by the security barrier around the Palestinian city of Qalqilyah in the West Bank when Mahmoud Nofal, who works in the tree nursery close by, saw him collapse, hit by a single bullet to the head from an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) sharpshooter. He died in hospital hours later, and was the youngest Palestinian shot dead by the IDF this year, until 10 October, when Mahmoud Samoudi, 12, died from gunshots sustained in Jenin in September.

The IDF says Adel threw a Molotov cocktail but Nofal, and Qalqilyah's governor, Rafa Rawajbeh, dispute that he did anything. Adel's father says he looked 10 and knew nothing about Molotov cocktails. "It may be a dangerous area there," he said, "but not for the soldiers." So what really happened?

Either a boy who looked 10 appeared so dangerous to soldiers they felt compelled to shoot him dead; or a trained sharpshooter identified an unarmed child in his crosshairs, and yet fired. The IDF says the incident is "being investigated", but it is unlikely any independent conclusion will emerge, since the IDF investigates such incidents itself.

What isn't disputed is that around 130 West Bank Palestinians have been killed by the IDF this year. Israel says most were terrorists or rioters, but at least 24 were children. Rayan



FTER 20 years of neglect since its listing in 2002, Glasgow's Church Street School Swimming Pool may now face demolition.

The pool was part of the gymnasium complex for a large board school built in 1903 in the Partick area of the city. While the school closed in the 1970s, the swimming pool remained in community use until 1997.

Glasgow city council sought to demolish it soon after, but following a campaign by locals, Historic Environment Scotland granted the school, pool and janitor's house category C listing in 2002. "The building and its interior is a rare survival of its type," says the listing, describing the pool's glazed roof, which lets in natural light, and its wrought iron interior decoration.

The Italianate main school building itself has since been turned into offices for the city's health and social care partnership. Despite the supposed protection of listing, the neighbouring pool building has been allowed to fall into terrible ruin. It has long featured on Scotland's buildings at risk register and is in very poor condition, with shrubs growing all over it.

When new fencing and signage recently went up around the site, questions arose over whether it was finally to be repaired... or destroyed. Glasgow city council says it is "developing a scheme for the redevelopment of the site" but told local journalists it was "too early to say" if this would involve restoration or complete demolition of the listed buildings.

In Carlisle, meanwhile, the city's iconic Turkish Health Suite is to be 'mothballed' after council chiefs deemed it too expensive to keep open – just weeks after winning the "Best Small Tourist Attraction" prize in the Cumbria Life Awards.

The city-owned Turkish baths are a rare and well-loved survivor of the Victorian and Edwardian craze for "oriental" bathing and until recently were run by outsourcing firm Better Leisure on the council's behalf, meaning visitors could enjoy the full Turkish bathing experience for less than a tenner.

The lavishly decorated baths are grade 2-listed, the 2010 listing report noting that the striped Moorish-style keyhole arches and decorative tiling and glazed faience work was "of good quality and complete".

A neighbouring 1970s swimming pool is to be demolished to make way for a new development. But as this column noted in 2019 (Eye 1500), while a new replacement pool was to open in a £27m edge-of-town leisure centre, there was no clarity on when (or if) the Turkish baths in the city centre would reopen for public use. The council claims it would cost more than £26,000 a month to keep them open as a standalone attraction.

However, Carlisle city council itself will soon be no more, as next April a new unitary authority, Cumberland council, will take over. A group of volunteers are working up plans for refurbishment and hope the Turkish baths can yet be resurrected for locals to enjoy.

In Swindon, plans have been submitted to

restore the listed dome over the swimming pool at the town's Oasis Centre using Eden Project-style insulation. The row over the remarkable 1970s building had been raging ever since

Historic England (HE) listed it last December (Eye 1562), thwarting a redevelopment that would have replaced the 45-metre dome with a much less interesting glazed round building.

The leisure centre is owned by Swindon borough council but was leased to Seven Capital after a contract with Better Leisure ended. Only last month, Conservative councillors were threatening to start the process of applying to the secretary of state for de-listing, prompting a statement from HE saying its engineers were working with Seven to find a suitable way to preserve the building.

The new proposals would give the dome an ethylene tetrafluoroethylene cover, similar to the bubble domes at the Cornish energy efficiency issues, while giving swimmers under the dome the same experience as before.

BEING MOTHBALLED: Carlisle's iconic Turkish Health Suite



IN A STATE: Glasgow's Church Street School pool

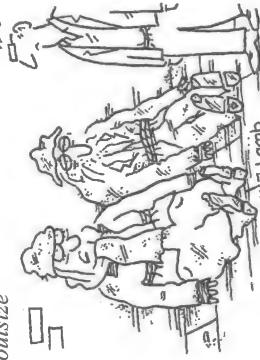


READERS will recall the absurd planned demolition of the large Marks and Spencer store on London's Oxford Street (Eye 1566), which is now being considered by a public inquiry, with much of the focus being on the carbon cost of destroying a building that could simply be refitted for modern use.

The attractive, six-storey landmark 1929 edifice is currently unlisted, and M&S wants to squeeze a nine-storey retail and office development, designed by Pilbrow & Partners, on to the site. It was called in by communities secretary Michael Gove after a campaign spearheaded by SAVE Britain's Heritage and the Architects' Journal highlighted the huge environmental and net-zero costs of the unnecessary destruction of a big, solid building.

Carbon cost isn't the only reason to keep the store. M&S professed to be "bewildered" by the call-in, claiming its building was of "low design quality". In fact it's a handsome stone structure that sits well with its fancier neighbours, some of which are listed. London Assembly member Siân Berry defended the building, noting: "It looks fantastic and like you imagine Oxford Street to look. It matches with Selfridges and is part of that parade of shops."

"The time came to down and outsize"



TROUBLE in the Peak District where the former boss of controversial welfare-to-work firm A4e, Emma Harrison, is appealing against an enforcement notice from the national park authority.

The notice orders her to remove a 100-space tarmac car park, a road and a wooden cafe building (above), all built without planning permission at her stately pile Thornbridge Hall near Bakewell, Derbyshire. Harrison says the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNP) is at fault for having "barricaded" its offices during the Covid pandemic. This led to her going ahead with the works during Covid restrictions in 2021 to ensure Thornbridge Hall's survival.

The PDNP sees things differently and says the unpermitted works "cause significant harm to heritage assets" and that the hall and its grounds sit in a sensitive conservation area. The park authority says "continued dialogue" with the landowner had previously established that the works needed planning permission and construction would be at their own risk.

PDNP's enforcement notice gave Harrison and her team six months to remove the offending wooden cafe, car park and road and to restore the site to its previous condition. Harrison's team launched an appeal and a social media campaign to drum up support with a dramatic plea to "help us to save Thornbridge from the Peak Park bulldozers". PDNP frostily pointed out that no bulldozer would be touching the Grade II-listed hall under its notice.

At a recent public inquiry to hear Harrison's appeal, barrister Jonathan Easton, representing Harrison and her husband Jim, said the cafe and car park encouraged the public to access heritage assets: "Not only does it allow more people to enjoy the building and grounds, it creates a revenue stream to fund restoration and ongoing repairs as well as providing educational and cultural opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds."

PDNP responded that these benefits could be provided without the unauthorised development and "do not, in any event, outweigh the harm caused to those assets". Kate Olley, a barrister for the PDNP, said the driveway was "exceptionally poorly constructed" and "crude" and that construction had "most likely" damaged the roots of up to 40 mature trees.

She told the inquiry: "As the site now presents, with a car park and large cafe, there is evidence of commercialism and a blatant disregard for local planning approval. This should not be allowed to stand." The planning inquiry will give its decision on the dispute later this month.

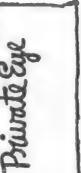
Emma Harrison was a high-profile public figure as A4e boss and was appointed the "families champion" by David Cameron's coalition government. A4e made its UK income solely from public contracts to find jobs for unemployed people. She resigned from her government advisory role and as chair of A4e in 2012 after employees at her company were investigated over multiple allegations of fraud. The then chair of the public accounts committee, Margaret Hodge, described A4e's record on welfare-to-work as "abysmal" and said the large dividends paid to the firm's senior managers were "ripping off the state". Harrison had paid herself £8.6m the previous year.

Letters



letters@private-eye.co.uk

Solar flare-up



Sir, The Agri Brigade piece on solar farms (Eye 1584) although factually correct was missing some very important points. Yes, solar farms take land out of food production but so do many other crops, such as vineyards, forestry, biomass for energy, crops grown for pharmaceuticals such as borage, crops for biofuels and land taken for rewilding. The list is endless and all grown on good grade 1, 2 and 3 land. Then there is all the commercial building, including the massive house building targets being encouraged by governments and local councils, most of which is built on prime agricultural land.



Eye to the future

PRIVATE EYE

SUCCESSION TO BORIS CHOSEN

Sir, Straight from the news just now I am compelled to congratulate you for your visionary front cover of Eye 1581 [“She’ll be out before you know it!”] Well done yet again. Please tell us what is about to happen next. DAVID BUNTING.

Funny coincidence

Sir, I enjoyed a genuine chuckle reading your clarification (“Sheff Slack” p7, Eye 1584) that “due out on 8 December” referred to the publication date of a biography of Liz Truss, not its subject. I was less amused, however, when it became very clear a few hours later from live coverage of parliament, that Lord Gnome is mitigating the spiralling costs of maintaining Gnome Towers by moonlighting as a speech writer for the Leader of the Opposition. This must stop, else my subscription will not outlast the present government.

R.M. CRORIE, Nantwich.

Hunt saboteur

Sir, MD writes (“Dog in the Hunt”, Eye 1584) that as chair of the Commons health committee Jeremy Hunt championed health and social care issues he was unable to tackle when he was health secretary “because of austerity”. Really?

Putting aside the fact that Hunt supported and voted for all those austerity measures, was not health secretary Jeremy Hunt consistently acting in exactly the way an essay in the 2005 pamphlet *Direct Democracy* suggested for the NHS to be undermined by underfunding and transfer of resources to the private sector? An essay authored by one... Jeremy Hunt? I wonder if doctors less senior than MD, or indeed nurses, staff or patients might agree.

MICHAEL CARLSON,

Surrey.

Er... er... ERM

Sir, Whoever penned “All Trussed Up” (p11, Eye 1584) was clearly not having to struggle to make a living in the early Nineties; for those of us who were, the ending of the Exchange Rate Mechanism experiment was a huge relief, not a “disastrous crashing out”. Germany needed high interest rates to stop their burgeoning economy overheating; we needed the exact opposite but were required to match theirs to meet the requirements of the ERM. My small business, like many, many others, was on the brink of collapsing from the crippling cost of essential borrowing made worse by many customers being already out of work. Thank heaven I am now almost retired.

PHIL BOOTHERSTONE,

Burton-on-Trent.

GOD, WHAT DID WE DO BEFORE THE INTERNET?



Fossil record

Sir, Where does Peter Somerville (“Purchasing power”, Letters, Eye 1584) think “green” energy sources like wind turbines, nuclear power stations, etc, come from? Does Harry Potter wave his magic wand and these things magically appear without any need for vast amounts of fossil fuel energy used in the mining and refining of the raw materials, the manufacturing of the various components, as well as their assembly and construction? And this is before the vast amounts of fossil fuel energy used in the transport between various locations. Then there is the infrastructure needed such as cabling and platforming for offshore wind turbines. And all this before the maintenance and eventual decommissioning of these sources...

Many people would be interested to hear Mr Somerville’s solutions as to how to handle the nuclear waste from more nuclear power stations which needs a source of powered refrigeration for approx. the next 30,000 years. And how this is to be powered?

The only real answer is the control and reduction of the planet’s exploding population. All environmental problems are caused by basically one thing: human overpopulation. Anything other than dealing totally with this problem, such as glueing oneself to things, is just re-arranging the deck chairs.

PAUL WELLS, Manchester.

Mine field

Sir, Doug McRoberts (“Coal shower”, Letters, Eye 1584) highlights an important fact, often overlooked: not all coal is equal. The UK sits on some of the best reserves of high quality, clean-burning coal in the world, vast swathes of which lay untouched. Instead of utilising this, we import at great environmental expense (but helpfully invisible to us) inferior Russian and Chinese coal (among others). This is mined in countries with minimal environmental controls, transported across the world, and finally consumed inefficiently with far more nasty impurities and by-products. The demand for coal on a small scale for the industrial and heritage sectors will not abate and is already a small proportion of our carbon emissions. We can either choose to control the supply chain and receive a better quality, cleaner product; or outsource the damage to the far side of the world and boast about having no nasty coal mines in our country.

THOMAS SWEENEY, Reading, Berks.

Power surge

Sir, Re landlords screwing tenants for energy costs (p41, Eye 1584), may I be the 94th electrical engineer to point out that *In the Back* has screwed its units of energy: 182 gigawatts [sic] greatly exceeds the entire installed electricity generation capacity of the UK. I expect *ItB* is referring to gigawatt-hours (GWh) of energy.

ANDY MACQUEEN CENG,
Basingstoke.





Thursday's chide

Sir,

A year ago, I felt compelled to leap into these pages in order to explain what Super Thursday is, and why booksellers and publishers give it a bit of annual welly. Yet here we are, 12 months on, and Bookworm is trotting out the very same argument (Eye 1583) which boils down to: because *Christmas* bestsellers are published throughout the autumn, Super Thursday should no longer be a thing. Lean in close, Bookworm, and I will whisper in your ear, again: Super Thursday is simply the day of the year that the greatest number of books are published and the trade has just decided to make a promotional song and dance about the fact. Bookworm is astonished to discover bestselling books are published on other days in the autumn (in fact, they are published all year round!) But it has ever been thus, with serial *Christmas* number one contenders like [Unfortunately, this letter had to be cut due to reasons of space and being very boring. Ed.]

TOM TIVNAN,

Managing editor, *The Bookseller*.

Going private

Sir, Your article on Spire Healthcare and Circle Health's recent financial results ('NHS plc', In the Back, Eye 1584) continues the fallacy that 'NHS = Good, private = Bad'. It is so outdated as to be embarrassing.

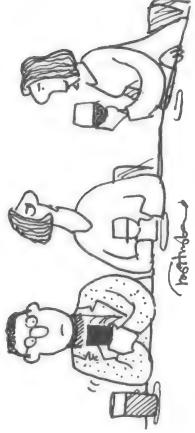
As the East Kent, Countess of Chester, Shrewsbury, Morecombe Bay, Gosport, Alder Hey, infected blood and many other scandals show, the NHS is capable of slaughtering its patients on an industrial scale. Repeatedly. If you think the nature of the ownership of these hospitals, and the management and culture that comes with it, has no influence on why these scandals continue to happen (and will keep happening), it beggars belief. Or, if it doesn't matter who owns a hospital as it has no impact on patient care, there is no need to be concerned about private ownership. You can't have it both ways.

TED TOWNSEND, London.

Brains

Sir, Would it be possible for you to ascertain the truth behind the rumour that Naga Munchetty was recently auditioned for the part of Brains in the remake of *Thunderbirds*?

BRIAN DUCKWORTH.



"You looking at my nerd?!"

Tokyo story

Sir,
Re "Japanese lessons" (MD's Pandemic Update, eye 1583), the Japanese do not keep a respectful social distance at all, not now and not since the pandemic started. I reside in the UK and Japan. Almost everyone in Japan wears masks, though. The reason Japan had far fewer deaths per capita from Covid than the UK is unknown. But it could have something or a lot to do with the way data are collected in Japan and the UK.

RALPH BAKER, Tokyo.

Sharp note

Sir,
Lunchtime O'Boulez seems to know something we at the Independent Society of Musicians do not (Music & Musicians, Eye 1584). We do not have loads of publishers or record labels as corporate sponsors. In fact, we do not have any corporate sponsors. It is why we are "Independent". We do have one or two who are corporate members. And just to be clear, our corporate members have no voting rights unlike individual members and no say in the running of the ISM.

DEBORAH ANNETTS,

Chief executive, Independent Society of Musicians.

French letter

Sir,
Further to your piece "McKinsey Crooked?" (p9, Eye 1584), I thought I'd be the 94th contributor to highlight McKinsey's withdrawal from public sector work in France (Canard Enchaîné article, 19 October) as a result of tax avoidance accusations and undue proximity to Macron and his team. I'll get out now to make the most of our hottest October on record!

TONY PALMER, South-West France.

Not so dumb after all...

Sir,

I felt I had reached the apogee of my passage of life when I saw my recently screened response on *The Chase* listed in your excellent feature "Dumb Britain" (Eye 1584). Thankfully my less dumb answers provided a not-insubstantial prize to allow me to renew my subscription for several years to come.

SIMON KEIGHTLEY, Chertsey.

Masking for trouble

Sir,
In Eye 1584 you decided to combine your Letters page with the Order of the Brown Nose in publishing Dr Tom Dolphin's approbation of Prof Phil Banfield's mask-wearing at Westminster Abbey ("Funereal coverage"). The correspondent's self-righteous tone coupled with his status as a junior member of a committee of which Prof Banfield's is chair made it an especially impressive example of arsliikan. While I'm at it, may I take this opportunity to thank my own boss for her exemplary judgement in giving me the day off for the Queen's funeral.

DR CHARLIE STANLEY,

Leicestershire.

Nobel, no idea

Sir,
"Nobel Pursuit" (Literary Review, Eye 1584) contained two very questionable claims. Firstly that Graham Greene was barred from gaining the Nobel Prize for Literature for "cuckolding a member of the Swedish Academy". I would have thought an objective assessment of his literary merit would have been enough in itself to deny him this prize. Secondly, the article suggests playwrights Tom Stoppard and Caryl Churchill would be worthy winners. While these are both writers of high quality, the Nobel Prize for Literature is global in its reach. The writer takes a chauvinistic, Anglo-centric view of what constitutes great writing. It is worth remembering that literary heights can be achieved in any language, not just English, and by writers from any country, not just England.

JOHN BOALER, Wilshire.

Commentatorballs

£10 paid for contributions

"He had one opportunity and scored two goals"

GLENN MURRAY, BBC1

"Liverpool will qualify with a draw, and even if they lose by less than one goal tonight"

DARREN FLETCHER, BT Sport

"Alisson, he's got nothing on, literally"

MARTIN KEOWN, BBC1

"He doesn't score many, but when he does they normally end up like this one, in the back of the net"

STEVE McMANAMAN, BT Sport

"It wasn't just a U-turn on the budget – it was actually going in completely the opposite direction"

PATRICK DARDIS, Radio 4

Contributors: Ken Mulen, Andy Yorke, Tom Carver, Matt Dipple, Alan Wright.



"Dad's taking it a bit too seriously this year"

"Commenting on this post, Marie Fox suggested 'Buy a motion-sensitive wildlife camera and you will soon have your culprit'. Diane White added 'Worst crime in my eyes to feel unsafe in your own home. Hope it stops soon.' Kayleigh Glosslow asked 'The million dollar question though: do you enjoy being called pappa bear?' (Huddersfield Examiner, 8/10/22. Spotter: Tim Makepeace)

- o -

o "The Lake Erie Walleye Trail championship fishing derby got underway as usual on the first Saturday in October," tournament director Jason Fischer told the press in Cleveland, Ohio, "near the Gordon Street Boat Ramp. The fall seasonal pattern typically yields similar size walleye – we call them 'cookie cutter fish' – so we were expecting a tight tournament, with most fish weighing about 4 pounds. But one walleye didn't seem quite right. It looked like a typical 4-pound fish, but it tipped the scale at 7.9 pounds, almost twice what it should have weighed.

"I thought 'no way', and when I squeezed the fish I could feel something unusual inside. So we cut the fish open, and found ten lead weights stuffed inside it, as well as various parts of fish fillets. We told the competitors 'we've got weights in fish!', and it sparked an angry scene at the event. There was more than \$500,000 in total prize money at stake, as well as the championship season title, so the temptation to cheat is obvious, but the competitors deserve better than this. We built the LEWT together, and I will defend its integrity at all costs. I've told the competitors I am disgusted, but I'm glad I caught the cheating taking place. You all deserve the best." (Game and Fish Magazine, 4/10/22. Spotter: David Krassner)

o Tofukui Temple dates back to the fifteenth century," Keishu Nagai of the temple's management office told reporters in Higashiyama Ward, Kyoto, "earning it the designation of an Important Cultural Asset. In particular it contains Japan's oldest existing toilet, a wooden building called tosu, the oldest remaining latrine in a Zen Buddhist temple. Unfortunately, a thirty-year-old driver from the Kyoto Heritage Preservation Association parked his car in front of the toilet, then hit the gas to restart the car without realising he was still in reverse. He crashed into the building, smashing through the wooden entrance door to the tosu, and eventually coming to a halt inside. The damage is considerable, but it is irreparable, and we would like somehow to restore the tosu to its original state."

Norihiko Murata, an official in charge of cultural heritage preservation in Kyoto, added "We've been told it is going to require a lot of work to restore. Walls inside have sustained damage, but fortunately the actual latrines – two rows of pits with twenty holes on either side – have survived intact. The tosus nicknamed hyakuseccchin (hundred person toilet), because it was once used by more than a hundred trainee monks. It is disappointing that this important cultural property has been damaged, and we will discuss how to restore it to retain as much cultural value as possible." (Japan Times, 19/10/22. Spotter: William Thorne)

- o -

o "A Yorkshire man is being tormented by a mystery stranger who keeps yelling 'porridge' through his letterbox." Samuel Port told his readers in Huddersfield. "The man, who lives in Boothtown, Halifax, and who we have anonymised, says he is at his wits' end, and has taken to social media to beg him to stop. The man wrote: 'Apologies if this post is not allowed, but I am wanting to get to the bottom of this as I'm at my wits' end. I live at Range Court flats, and for the record, the recreationally offended will say they don't like such material, but it pays to know your audience and the Eye certainly does."

ROBERT EDWARDS, Edinburgh.
...The vessel containing my late mother-in-law's ashes was delivered by the undertaker in a bag for life. Was this just unintentional funeral black humour?
TIM BANKS, Knutsford.

- o -

JULIE FOSTER.
...I enjoyed E.J. Thribb's excellent tributes to Angela Lansbury. The lad mentions several of her films but not *Blue Hawaii* in which she played the mother of Elvis Presley's character, Chaawick Gates. At the time she was 35 and Presley was 26. *Shome kind of record, surely?*
JIM C. WILSON (old enough to have seen *Blue Hawaii* when first released in 1962), East Lothian.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH



RICHARD GROVES, Wiltshire.

...I am afraid your cartoonist KJ Lamb (p23, Eye 1584) perpetuates a common myth regarding the setting of the famous scene in "Romeo and Juliet". Nowhere in the play is it specified that Juliet spoke to Romeo from a balcony. In Act 2, Scene I, the stage direction reads: "JULIET appears above at a window" which Romeo acknowledges in his dialogue: "But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks? No balcony anywhere."

ANGUS GAFFRAIDI, Leytonstone.

...I lament the appropriation of the black and yellow Fred Perry polo shirt by the North American far-right group, the Proud Boys. But contrary to your correspondent's claim (White Shower, Eye 1584) this design is still in production and on sale in the UK. However, Fred Perry stopped selling it in the US and Canada in 2019/20. Its website points out that Fred was the son of a working-class socialist MP and went into business with a Jewish immigrant from Eastern Europe – hardly a role model for the likes of the Proud Boys or the subjects of your article.

ANDREW COLEMAN, Brighton.

Hospice humour

Sir, While Andrew Smith ("Deathly humour", Letters, Eye 1584) claimed to be deeply offended by your Bag for Life at a Hospice Shop cartoon (p38, Eye 1583), he does not speak for everyone. As a former hospice worker, and as the husband of someone who received excellent terminal care at our local hospice, I found the cartoon amusing and a little reminder (always useful) that none of us knows how much longer we have in which to enjoy this life.

GRAHAM PIERCE, Oxford.

...My dear friend Peter told me that, many years ago, he handed his terminally ill father an early Christmas present knowing it unlikely that the old man would make it to 25 December. His father unwrapped the gift to find a calendar for the following year and they both laughed like drains. His father never needed the calendar but some people in a hospice may need a laugh. Of course, the recreationally offended will say they don't like such material, but it pays to know your audience and the Eye certainly does.

ROBERT EDWARDS, Edinburgh.
...The vessel containing my late mother-in-law's ashes was delivered by the undertaker in a bag for life. Was this just unintentional funeral black humour?
TIM BANKS, Knutsford.

Eye love...

Sir, *Cruella de Braverman*. That, on its own, justified the purchase of the previous edition of the Eye. The PM's WhatsApp Group is continually inspired.

JULIE FOSTER.

...I enjoyed E.J. Thribb's excellent tributes to Angela Lansbury. The lad mentions several of her films but not *Blue Hawaii* in which she played the mother of Elvis Presley's character, Chaawick Gates. At the time she was 35 and Presley was 26. *Shome kind of record, surely?*
JIM C. WILSON (old enough to have seen *Blue Hawaii* when first released in 1962), East Lothian.

Minnie Driver: Managing Expectations

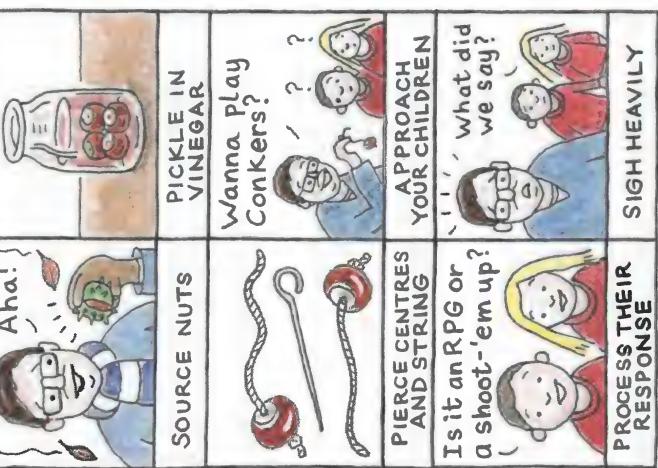
This event has been cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances
South Bank Centre website

Claire Connolly Chief Financial Officer, Clearly Drinks

BBC News

Apparently BY MIKE BARFIELD

CONKERS: HOW THE MODERN GAME IS PLAYED





Liz Truss MP The Caretaker Prime Minister's 'Looze with Liz' WhatsApp Group

Before I say goodbye, I'd like to thank you all for the amazing job you did helping me achieve so much in my time as Prime Minister. Firstly, I am proud to say that under my leadership, the Queen died.

Jeremy Hunt
And then the economy did as well.

I wasn't going to mention that. You have to be bold. And I was. And decisive. And I was. **Jeremy Hunt**
If by bold and decisive, you mean reckless and mad, then fair enough.

Thank you, Jeremy. That's very kind, but the global circumstances were wrong.

Thérèse Coffey
That's right, hun, we really should have asked the global circumstances to resign in disgrace. You did a great job.

Jeremy Hunt
Have you been drinking, Thérèse?

Thérèse Coffey
Of course, I'm Minister of Health. I'm self-medicating. 🌊

Before I go, I'd like to quote a Roman philosopher called Sennapod.

Thérèse Coffey
I think you mean Seneca, luv. Though I've got some old Sennapod in my handbag if you're a bit bunged up.

James Cleverly
Bunged up? The rest of us have got the shits! 🚰

It was Sennapod who once said "a low tax economy based on unfunded borrowing guarantees growth".

Jeremy Hunt
No he didn't, Liz.

I also wanted to add, in my defence, that whoever takes over will inherit...

At this point, WhatsApp crashed, unable to cope with the unprecedented volume of political manoeuvring by Conservative leadership candidates and there was a nationwide outage lasting several hours.

Thank you for listening.

Jeremy Hunt
Gosh, that's an amazing achievement, Liz. You've managed to crash WhatsApp as well as the economy. 🍸

Boris Johnson has joined the group.

Boris Johnson
Guess who's back, folks, to save the day! It's the Bozzter! It's Cincinnatus back from his sun-younger by the pool! It's Sir Boris Churchill back from his tropical luxury wilderness to save a grateful nation once again!



Thérèse Coffey
I think we all need a drink now 🍷

Boris Johnson
It's King Arthur, the once and future World King, yanking his sword out of the missus to claim his birthday! Sorry, a big jet-lagged. History a bit all over the shop. Here's me rounding up the troops.

Forget Party Gate, it's Party Great!



Jacob Rees-Mogg

Hurrah! It's the Second Coming! It's the Resurrection, He is with us! Exultamus et jubilamus!

Boris Johnson
Thanks, Creepie, now let's make this happen. I've got the numbers. Dudders assures me I've got 350 million MPs behind me, so I'll be in Downing Street by Friday. Put the wine back in the fridge and get the paper hats out, we're going to party like it's 1922! 🎉

Sir James Duddridge MP

Um, about those numbers. It's less like 350 million and more like 54.

Boris Johnson
What?! Dudders by name, Dudders by nature! Still, never mind! The dear old dotty members won't listen to the MPs. They adore me!

Sir Graham Brady

Hm, perhaps we won't let the members have a say this time.

Boris Johnson

Pish and tosh, Brady Bunchster! The momentum's behind me. I've just got to do a deal with Rishi or get into bed with Penny.

Nadine Dorries

Boo-hoo-hoo, it's so unfair. 🤪

Boris Johnson

Not literally, Mad Nad. Though those old swimsuit shots... Phwoar! Splash! I'm up for it! The leadership, that is. 🍆

Sir Graham Brady

Following a hasty overhauling of the system, we have decided that Boris has lost, Rishi Sunak has won, and there will be no need to send emails to the nursing homes of this great nation to get their view.

Rishi Sunak has joined the group.

Rishi Sunak

Hello, everyone. And goodbye, most of you. I've just won! This is MY WhatsApp group now. My ultra-cool media team have renamed it 'Liz Out to Help Out'.

I don't get it.

The administrator has removed Liz Truss from the group.

WEATHER VERY WARM FOR THIS TIME OF YEAR

by Our Meteorological Staff **Sunny Day**

YES, autumn is here! But forget the traditional season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, now it's the season of sunshine and fruitiness, as you go to the beach and take off all your clothes!

It's time to enjoy classic autumn beverages, like ice-cold rose and frappuccino to go, and definitely not time to think about whether there's anything funny going on with the weather, as that's gloomy and melancholy and autumnal! No, concentrate on these, pictures of bikini-clad lovelies swimming off the coast of Scarborough (p3), or these other pictures of adorable toddlers frolicking in grass meadows where the leaves haven't fallen off the trees yet (p7), or these pictures of palm trees and cacti growing in the deserts of Inverness (p9)!

On other pages

- Climate change not slowing down at all (p94)
- Humans doing nothing to change habits in face of climate disaster (p94)
- We really need to do something (*cut for reasons of space*)

Brazil Nut Shock!



"Thank...fuck for that!"

GERMANY TO LEGALISE CANNABIS



Auf Weenderschen!

IN recent weeks, we may have given the mistaken impression that Rishi Sunak was hopelessly plodding and dull, a candidate sadly lacking the verve and fresh ideas of Liz Truss, with no vision for getting the British economy out of its current malaise. Rishi's lack of sparkle is the reason we urged Conservative party members to ignore the wishes of Tory MPs who chose him as their preferred candidate, urging them instead to opt for bold change rather than the predictable and boring status quo at this challenging time in our nation's history.

We're pleased that this time the vote did not go to Conservative party members who inexplicably opted last time for the empty vessel of Liz Truss over a man of substance endorsed by the majority of Tory MPs at this challenging time in our nation's history.

We apologise for any confusion and any confusion in the future when Rishi targets pensioners amid his austerity drive and we condemn him as the wrong man to be prime minister in these challenging times and suggest that Penny Mordaunt should have been the one who (cont. p94)



Keir Starmer
WRITES

HELLO! Well, what a week it's been! With the accession of Rishi Sunak to PM, I've finally got the Conservative party exactly where I want it!

It's a well-known fact that saddling yourselves with a boring, dry policy wonk who struggles to inspire anyone as leader is political death for any party – and I should know, because Angela Rayner tells me this about a dozen times a day!

I have a grudging sympathy for Rishi (one can't help but find empathy for a man who has to take over as leader from a swivel-eyed lunatic!), but one can't allow one's personal feelings to get in the way of opposing the government, and

by "opposing" I mean, of course, agreeing with the government on everything that matters!

From stiff sentences for climate protesters to not reversing Brexit, there's nothing they can't propose that we think should be broadly kept and slightly changed in tiny, fiddly ways!

But I do disagree with them on one major point: we should have a general election! It's pitiful that the Conservatives are just changing leaders to avoid the judgement of the voters and Rishi is showing wretched cowardice by hanging around without a mandate and running the clock down!

It would have been a lot better if we had had a general election against Liz Truss, rather than Rishi Sunak, because she was a lot easier to defeat at Prime Minister's Questions – usually because she didn't turn up and was under a desk!

Never mind. Sincerely,

Keir

JOHNSON NOT TO WITHDRAW FROM CONTEST

by Our Political Staff **U. Blquitious**

RACHEL JOHNSON has dramatically announced that she will not retire from public life, saying it is "in the national interest" for her to be on television or radio "at this time and, in fact, all the time".

Despite pressure from colleagues and friends to step down, the blonde former Prime Minister's sister was adamant that

Secretive One-Party State Endorses New Leader

by Our United Kingdom Correspondent **Faye Ling State**

A coup attempt by former strongman leader Boris Johnson was ruthlessly crushed when the ruling elite fell in behind Sunak, and Johnson was also declared a non-person.

The embattled citizens cheered weakly as the ruling Conservative party pledged a great and glorious era of "Prosperity through Austerity", as it declared "The Decade of the Growing Pie" is over".

Chairman Sunak rallied his countrymen, promising to raise living standards and pledging to bring mortgage rates down from 6% to 7.5% and boosting growth from 1% to 0%.

AFTER a brief internal battle, senior officials in the United Kingdom have appointed as their new leader, Rishi Sunak, after he secured the support of loyalist party MPs.

Having manhandled the previous leader, Liz Truss, off centre stage, senior party officials in the United Kingdom quickly consigned her disastrous growth plan to the dustbin of history, as she was declared a non-person.

CAPTAIN STEADIES SHIP

by Our Metaphorical Staff **Des Aster**



FOLLOWING Captain Truss's disastrous navigation of the RMS *Titanic*, steering the ship into an iceberg lettuce, the newly appointed Captain Sunak says the vessel is back on course.

Speaking from the bottom of the ocean, he giggled, "We sank without a trace very fast, but now things have stabilised having hit the sea bed."

He added, "I am confident we can now regain the confidence

and trust of the passengers and complete our maiden voyage without further drama."

Observers have reported no more signs of panic from the abandoned wreck, which lies serenely under the choppy waters above.

Advertisement

HOME ANNOUNCEMENT LECTERN™

LOST your Job? Leaving for the woman next door? Want to tell your parents you're gay? The hamster's dead? Whatever your important statement, this is the perfect way to deliver it in style. Just place the lectern outside your front door and the family will know big news is afoot. Watch the neighbours gather with their cameras, as you prepare for your big moment.

Choose from the following styles, as seen on TV's smash-hit show *The News*...



(cont. 2094)

JOHNSON NOT TO WITHDRAW

by Our Political Staff **U. Blquitious**

she would continue to talk about her brother on national media until "at least 2024 and maybe beyond".

This means that the contest to be the most annoying Johnson must go to another round, with Stanley Johnson declaring that he too is "still in it to win it" and claiming to have "hundreds of supporters".

Meanwhile, Lord Jo Johnson of



The New Prime Minister's Highly Confidential WhatsApp Group

Right, everyone, let's get down to business. So my first job is to assemble a Cabinet of All the Talents.

Jacob Rees-Mogg
Jacob Rees-Mogg
That won't take long. Hahaha. Quite amusing, if I say so myself.

The administrator has removed Jacob Rees-Mogg from the group.

Boris Johnson
Damn and blast you, Rishi! I could have been Prime Minister if I wanted to. But I didn't. I won, really. But in the national interest, I decided to lose. So now the result's been decided, I'm pulling out early.

Jeremy Hunt
That's a first!

The administrator has removed Boris Johnson from the group.

When I say Cabinet of All the Talents, I mean All the Talents. Plus Dominic Raab. And James Cleverly. And Gavin Williamson. Nadhim Zahawi and Grant Shapps.

Matt Hancock
May I be the first to congratulate you, Prime Minister. You are an extraordinarily brilliant person and will make an incredible Prime Minister. Wise, imaginative and with the boldness of vision to give former Health Ministers a second chance.

Jeremy Hunt
I only screwed the NHS. Not a spad in the stationery cupboard.

Matt Hancock
Hey, that's unfair! My only mistake was to fall in love – just as I have with our amazing new leader! ❤️❤️

Thérèse Coffey
I feel sick.

I haven't even demoted you yet! You're going to be Minister for the Environment.

Thérèse Coffey
Environment? Who cares about that?

This is what you've got to sort out.



Thérèse Coffey
What's the problem? They're all smoking. Looks good to me.

Matt Hancock
Ah-ha! I think I spot a sudden vacancy in the Health Department!



Not for you, Matt. I've given the job to Steve Barclay.

Matt Hancock

Oh! Excellent choice!
Displaying all the wisdom I'd expect from such a towering figure on the political scene, with so many jobs yet to hand out. You really are great!

The administrator has removed Matt Hancock from the group.

Suella, despite my reservations, I'm telling you in confidence that you are back as Home Secretary.

Suella Braverman

Great. I'll just email it to everyone I know! Along with these cabinet minutes and your password. Anyone know the nuclear codes?

Ben Wallace

You clearly don't know the ministerial codes.

Suella Braverman

Butt out Wallace, I can do what I like. I've done a grubby deal with Rishi.

James Cleverly
Wow! A deal! What's that all about?

Suella now holds one of the most important jobs in politics – keeping the far-right off my back.

Jeremy Hunt

What happened to your promise of this government having "integrity, professionalism and accountability"?

Suella Braverman

Well, nought out of three isn't bad.

Come on, guys! This happened six whole days ago. Let's not argue about ancient history. Westminster is a completely different place now, compared to that distant time of last week. The days of backbiting and plotting are over!

Penny Mordaunt

Absolutely! Though I should point out that I came second in the contest – and if you're anything to go by, I should be Prime Minister by Christmas!

Sir Graham Brady

Do you actually think Rishi is going to last till Christmas? Excellent news. Stability at last!



"It's sad, they still believe Brexitman is going to come and save them."



PRODUCT RECALL

We apologise for attempting to sell the following item in the Halloween Gnomemart range...

The Suella Braverman Horror Mask



THIS product has received a record number of complaints from parents who have said it is just too lifelike and terrifying for adults at this time of year, or indeed any other. When we said the Mask would give "hours of fun!" we now realise this is not true, and instead may cause lifelong trauma and nightmares of the kind in which you are shipped off to Rwanda. This was a genuine mistake and we apologise. We hope you now give us a second chance and buy this brilliant:

The Suella Braverman Horror Mask



Truss' phone hacked



"A selfie in a tank... another selfie... er, more selfies"

CONSPIRACY UPDATE

ELON MUSK TWITTER/PUTIN SPECIAL

CONSPIRACY UPDATE: The news that Elon Musk has finally bought Twitter has really put the twat among the pigeons! Every one of our contributors has tweeted their intention to leave Twitter as soon as everyone else goes first!

'TRUTHTELLER69%*&\$' was the first to tweet that he would never tweet again under the new regime. In his next tweet after that one, he points out that:

"Have you noticed the suspitious similarity between the TWITTER symbol and the NAZI party symbol? Now LOOK at their NEW PLAN plan to CHARGE for Twitter. It is obviously a plan by the far right to replicate the HOLOCOST. Only instead of JEWS they are attempting to remove 6 MILLION Twitter accounts!"

'MAGA465' on the other hand sees it from a different perspective. In HIS next tweet after the one saying he's never tweeting again, he says: "The FACT that Twitter is almost identical to the JEWISH SYMBOL for peace can't be a coincidence! This is a JEWISH CONSPIRACY to remove all reasonable fair-minded NAZIS from the soshal media site. This is dangerous. They risk pushing NAZIS into the DARK WEB where they may end up becoming quite EXTREME in there politics."

He continues for many more tweets:

"Elon Musk is a KNOWN friend of the ELITES. He deliberately TWEETED a 'conspiracy theory' about Nancy Pelosi's husband which was COMPLETELY TRUE. He cunningly tweeted it KNOWING that, as he is a world-class LOONEY with strange hair that he would NOT BE BELIEVED." Another contributor 'ALLUMINATUS89' begs to differ. Right after HIS last ever tweet he tweets:

"I think we are missing the fact that Elon Musk is a close friend of Vladimir Putin. This purchase of Twitter comes just at the same time we hear of Putin doubles used to prevent assassination. I think we should expect Twitter to be filled with blue-tick Putin accounts.

"These will be decoy accounts, so that no one will know who to troll. Putin will be able to ghost us all on Twitter, which we can all agree is far worse than murder and genocide."

So there you have it! Such a shame about Twitter! I'd go back to LinkedIn, but I hear it's secretly owned by George Soros! The mystery continues...



POPE WARNS CLERGY ABOUT 'ONLINE EVILS'

US President Salutes Appointment Of PM On Religious Festival

by Political Staff Dee Wahly

Joe Biden has applauded the 'milestone' of the accession of the new British Prime Minister on what he called "a very auspicious day that was important to many millions of people around the globe just like the new PM."

Speaking at a White House event to mark the religious festival, Mr Biden hailed "Mr Rosh Hashanah" as the first Jewish leader to be appointed to No10 Downing Street, before hastily correcting himself, saying, "I mean, after Mr Disraeli of course, who I remember having

many great meetings with during his many tenures as British leader," before he was even more hastily escorted from the room by aides.

Said the British Ambassador, "This is good news for our special relationship with the US. Rishi's probably only around for a couple of weeks, but already the US president has bothered to half-learn his name! This is a giant leap forward for the prospect of a trade deal, moving us up from the back of the queue, just ahead of North Korea."

US satirist in UK racism row

by Our TV Correspondent
Tess Daly-Show

TOP American TV satirist Trevor Noah-Idea has expressed his shock at the levels of racism in Britain, following the broadcast of a single nutter talking about Rishi Sunak on a BBC phone-in show.

Said 'Noah-Clue', "This is appalling! One bloke ranting on local radio constitutes a racist

backlash on a scale unseen in... say, America... where we merely have occasional police victimisation of innocent black citizens, the odd KKK lynch mob terrorising communities and a few joggers shot by armed householders for daring to be black in possession of trainers."

Said a British spokesperson, "This really is the pot calling the kettle racist."



Ye Daily Terrorgraph

November 5 1605

CONSPIRATOR ADMITS 'GUY FAWKES MADE A MISTAKE'

By our Parliamentary staff
Penny Fortheguy-Mordaunt

ONE of Guy Fawkes's former colleagues has reluctantly accepted that the plotters who narrowly failed to blow up the House of Commons were guilty of a tactical error.

"The plan to detonate a mini-bomb to bring about lasting change was right, but we went too fast and too far," said Sir Jacobite Rees-Mogg. He continued, "We all want in the long term to see Parliament a smouldering ruin, but the timing was wrong. We should have waited until there weren't any justices of the

peace around, before carrying out our mini-bomb plot." The veteran Rees-Mogg has, as he said, "learnt his lesson" from the foiled mini-bombjet, and is giving interviews to everyone in the Stuart media, saying, "We were right all along. Some of us were very right, and one day there will be a big black hole where Parliament used to be."

THE KING OF TROUBLES

A short story special by Dame Hedda Shoulders

ONE DOES so worry that this awful Crown thingie on the TV will make people think that I am some sort of weirdo..." King Charles was in ruminative mood as he confided in his oldest and most trusted friend. "I mean, the viewers are bound to believe that it is a documentary and that the strange, eccentric and bad-tempered Charlie on the telly is the same as your actual old chum, Charles."

There was no reply from the aspidistra in the corner of the Royal Drawing Room in Buckingham Palace, where the Artist formerly known as Prince Charles kept his easel and watercolours, should the muse strike him at any time. Charles continued: "I know you like to keep your counsel, but I take your silence to mean that you agree with my sense of foreboding and share my disappointment that a life dedicated to good works and public service can be served up as a tawdry melodrama in order to line the pockets of the American executives at the ghastly Netgain Corporation..."

Charles was suddenly aware of the presence of Sir Alan Fitzightly, Royal Pen Pursuivant, Steward of the Stinkwell and Master of the MontBlanc.

"You're not talking to the plants again are you, Sire? I'm afraid the aspidistra doesn't have security clearance and the new Prime Minister has just arrived."

"Oh, not again. Dear oh dear. She really is..."

Charles stopped himself in mid-flow, expecting a reprimand from his ever vigilant aide-de-campion at the slightest indication that the new Monarch was about to express an unconstitutional opinion of the sort he was now sworn to abjure. But in this instance, like the aspidistra, Sir Alan said nothing, leaving the missing word hanging in the air like the pungent smoke from the Queen Consulate's Menthol Health Cigarillos.

"Your Majesty, may I present your Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasuretrove, Amazon Primus Inter Pares and Leader of the Conservative and Uturnist Party..."

"Hello, Mrs Truss!" But instead of the awkward curtseying automaton Charles had expected, in walked a small, dapper Asian-looking gentleman in a shiny suit whose trousers, to a layman's eye, seemed to have

stopped short on the journey to his shoes. "Oh dear, oh dear," Charles muttered. "Are you quite all right, Prime Minister? I heard you were under pressure to make some changes, but really this is quite unprecedented."

Sir Alan then swiftly whispered in his master's ear. "This is Mr Rishi, Sire." "Oh yes, of course," Charles blustered, whilst privately thinking who on earth was this Mr Rishi? Was he one of those Commonwealth chaps... yes, that was probably it, he must have met him on his tour of the Subcontinent when he visited the Hendl Kushti and the... great temples of the Fluijab. "So pleased to meet you again, Mr Rishi." And what was it Mama had taught him to do next as she had prepared him for the onerous duties of Kingship over the long decades of apprenticeship...? Of course... Now he remembered... "Have you come far?" he asked Mr Rishi brightly.

"Indeed I have, Sire. As I said in my video, let me tell you a story of a young couple who arrived in a new country and made a life through hard work and sheer dedication to..."

"That's fascinating!" Charles hastily interrupted what looked like being a very long answer. "Are you coming to the coronation?" he inquired politely. For some reason, Mr Rishi laughed and said, "I've just had mine, thank you!"

"And which Commonwealth country are you head of again?" Charles asked in confusion.

"Britain, Sire."

Charles was somewhat flummoxed by this unexpected reply. "And how are things going there?"

The suave Mr Rishi looked thoughtful and sincere. "Mistakes have been made, Sire. But I promise you, I can fix them."

"Jolly good," beamed Charles. "Like our old friend and adviser, Sir Jimmy, with his catchphrase 'J'm'll...'"

Sir Alan coughed loudly to prevent an embarrassing reminder of one of the least savoury characters to feature in the rich tapestry of royal life over the preceding thousand years.

"Mr Rishi's family come originally from



India, your Majesty," he explained.

"What a coincidence!" replied the King.

"We used to own India."

"It now belongs to my wife," said Mr Rishi.

Charles was impressed. "Well, that's handy - perhaps she could lend us some money? Apparently, the previous lot in charge here have made a terrific hash of things. It said in one of my Red Boxes that the UK has lost so much money that the economy looks like the Black Hole of Calcutta... but not in a good way."

Mr Rishi laughed and bowed nervously, his trousers riding up above his knees, as Sir Alan hurriedly ushered him out of the room. "Thank you for coming in, Mr Rishi, I am sure we will see you here again. Or maybe not. Who knows? Ciao!" Charles meanwhile turned towards his companion in the corner. "Well, that went rather well I thought," he declared to his reticent green friend.

"If only those TV johnnies from *The Crown* could see this moment and capture it accurately for posterity, then my grateful people would come to appreciate the job I am doing on their behalf and come to love me as they loved my royal namesakes..." apart from King Charles the First obviously..."

Outside the palace, the cries of the paparazzi could faintly be heard as the Prime Minister made the seemingly long journey to Downing Street.

"You read Harry's book yet, Prime Minister? Is the King gonna abdicate?" they cried in turn, their voices fading into the mournful autumnal mists..."

(To be continued...)

CHARLES BLOCKED FROM ATTENDING CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE



WORD CLOUD ABOUT WORD CLOUDS

Desperate Misleading
Meaningless Lighter font
Small font
Piss-poor Annoying Unread
Snooze Dull
Lazy Formulaic Big font
Yawn Boring Unresearched
Page-filler Made-up

Exclusive to all newspapers

MY FORD FIESTA MEMORIES

by Our Motoring Correspondent Phil Herup

YOU never forget your first Forgi

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Dietrich Mateschitz, Austrian billionaire and Formula One team boss

So. Farewell
Then Dietrich Mateschitz,
Marketing genius and

Discoverer of the
Energy drink
“Red Bull”

You claimed that
“Red Bull gives
You wings.”

That now

This is true.

That James Corden Bleu Dinner In Full



| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------|----------|------------|
| Chip on shoulder | Massive beef | Steamed-up pudding | Lashings of tongue | Complete ham | Simply offal | Too much dough | Cock au vain | Hot tempeh | Roasted waiter | Followed by | Egg on face | Grovelax | Humble pie |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|------------|----------------|--------------------|-------------|----------|------------|

CHANNEL FOUR PROGRAMME IDEAS MEETING



"It has come to our attention that you're

DICTIONARY CORNER
Going AWOL
(broadcasting slang, believed to originate at the BBC)
Being everywhere all the time. Suffering from ubiquity. Experiencing omni-presence. The opposite of AWOL (Absent Without Leave).

'VAR RUINING FOOTBALL COMPLAIN FANS'

by Our VAR Correspondent
Rebekah Vardy

AFTER yet another
interminable wait for a
decision, football fans have
decided they've had enough
with the controversial Video
Assistant Referee.

"It's a travesty," said one England fan. "We were confident that the ball had crossed the line after Geoff Hurst's strike, but now VAR's come in, they're looking at it again and we may have to hand the 1966 World Cup over to the Germans. Talk about 56 years of hurt!"

Said a German fan, "That's not all, Tommy. We want another look at that goal scored by Private Wilkins in the 1914 Christmas Day football match. This marginal offside decision



Netflix's 'The Crown' in new insensitivity row

by Our TV Staff
Ray Tings

ONCE again, the popular streamed royal TV series *The Crown* finds itself at the centre of a fresh controversy.

This time, the show's producers are complaining that newspaper coverage of its lid-lifting melodrama is unfair and inaccurate.

Said one Netflix executive, "If you were to believe what you see in the papers, *The Crown* is nothing but a tawdry exercise in sensationalist Royal bashing, in a deliberate attempt to make money out of the suffering of the House of Windsor. They're not portraying *The Crown* fairly."

She continued, "Nor are they considering the feelings of those directly involved. Our researchers are living this series every day. And as for our make-up team, which is admittedly an unusual name for our script writers, they stand by their depiction of events and find it deeply distressing to be told that it's all rubbish."

In a further twist during

the filming of the Diana crash, producers claimed to be harassed by papers, who sent their photographers to chase the actress playing Diana, as she was recreating the drive



WORLD CUP SPOT THE TATCHELL

CAN you spot the gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell in this action shot from central Doha?

Clue: he's not there, because he's been removed by the Qatari secret police and deported back to Britain!

Anyone who spotted Mr Tatchell will also be removed by secret police to an undisclosed location, where they will be greeted with world-renowned Qatari hospitality (having their documents removed and being placed in a cell where they will receive a traditional beating).

could yet change the course of history, offering a retrospective boost of morale to our troops on the Western Front."

VAR is also threatening to overturn the historic victory of the great clash between England and the Normans in 1066. If it's proven that Harold was illegally pushed into the path of the arrow, this should have resulted in a red card for William the Conqueror, who should have been sent back across the channel in disgrace.

Other nations are joining in the VAR controversy, as Philistine supporters of Goliath are claiming that David clearly handled the pebble before firing it at the head of the... (That's enough VAR - Ed. No, hang on... let's look at it again.)



THE DAILY QATARGRAPH

The Emirate's very

conservative newspaper

Curb your affections, British football fan told

by Our World Cup Staff
Mohammed El Bee Gee Tee QueuePlus

THE Qatari government has issued a warning to top soccer supporters James Cleverly, the British Foreign Secretary, advising him to restrain himself when declaring his affections.

Said a spokesman, "It may be acceptable in Britain to gush about how much you love Liz Truss, Boris Johnson or Rishi Sunak. But here in Qatar this sort of shameless promiscuity is frowned upon. "We don't mind Mr Cleverly having these preferences privately,



LATE NEWS

■ British Foreign Secretary James Cleverly calls on fans at Qatar world cup to be 'respectful of the host nation'. Using all his diplomatic skills, he told supporters that Britain had a lot of business in Qatar and that he didn't want them to 'queer the pitch'.

From The Message Boards

BBC lost tapes
Members of the online community respond to the major issues of the day...

Guys, I see the Beeb is celebrating its centenary with classic lost broadcasts by the Beatles and Hancock (Tony not Matt!). They were recorded by amateur enthusiasts and found years later in lofts, skips and car boot sales. For my part, I have an early black-and-white television memory of a man wearing a bowler hat and jumping around on a pogo stick. I'm pretty sure he had a fluffy white tail too, like Bunny Girls at the Playboy Club...any ideas, you lot? And what missing memories would you like to see again? – **Bogbrush**

You're not imagining it, Bogbrush. It was a public information film about vasectomy, which was criticised for its misleading message and not shown again. It began with a dubious insinuation about deformities resulting from fathering a child in later life, with a cartoon showing a girl playing alongside her sister, who looks like a giant fried egg with eyes and a mouth. In the next bit we are told that the procedure itself is 'as quick and easy as' as you're wearing your shoes', with accompanying pictures of a hand vigorously brushing a brogue. We then see a nurse handing a cup of tea to a man who has a small sticking plaster on his arm. Finally, he is back home, bouncing around on his pogo stick. The narrator laughs and says, 'Well, it must be the weather!' The implication clearly being that within hours he is full of vim and ready for sex. – **Dr Robert**

Well remembered, doc! An amended version was released subsequently with an additional scientific scene featuring Professor Curly, a cartoon character from the children's comic The Beeler. Years later it became a cult favourite in student circles when it was included with other public information shorts in the compilation film, 'Christopher, It's Time We Had a Chat'. – **Reel McCoy**

Whenever I see the state opening of parliament, I always regret the fact that cameras weren't allowed in the days when new MPs had to demonstrate their allegiance by climbing a ladder and licking Black Dog's Tail (a tarred rope that hung from the rafters of the House of Commons). In 1964, Wilson's government replaced it with an electric buzzer on the ceiling, which is pressed with a long ceremonial staff. They call it 'progress'. – **Anglia Potatrix**



There was an old-school Labour politician called Bill Bowes who was sponsored by the basin-makers union, and he was known as 'Today's Voice of the North End Road'. I wonder if a recording exists of him singing "My Grandfather's Clock Was Too Big For The Shelf" at the party conference. He mispronounced the word 'clock' at least twice, and in the most embarrassing way. I'm sure she was drunk and it wouldn't surprise me if he did it deliberately.

– **Taffy Meg**

That reminds me of a notorious live radio broadcast on the decriminalisation of homosexuality. It was held in a gay club and when reporter Jonathan Marlowe was jokingly challenged to 'give it a go', he agreed! With customary professionalism, Marlowe kept up a running commentary throughout, although he struggled to achieve his usual fluency. I am now being ***** of medium height,' he announced at one point, adding that, 'I shan't be making a habit of it.' The programme went out late at night and nobody pulled the plug, but if a recording exists it could never be played nowadays, as the language was very much 'of its time'. – **Father Red Cap**

I would love to see the withdrawn 1970s episode of the Goodies which satirised industrial unrest at British Leyland with a story about industrial action involving a different kind of plant: British Leyland!! They organise a 'grow slow' (a reference the 'go slow' tactic employed by unions at the time) but this backfires because people are delighted that their hedges don't need pruning so often! Meanwhile in a clever parody of the recent miners' strike, the country is paralysed by a 'minus strike', as mathematicians, stockbrokers and accountants refuse to use minus signs, thus making it impossible to do subtraction, and causing rampant inflation. It's as relevant now as it was then! – **Goody Yum Yum**

Time to end the disastrous broadcasting experiment. – **Sword of Truth**

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK



THE ONE WHERE MATT PERRY TALKS SPOONS

Do you have a favourite spoon?

I was so successful, so young, so fast, that I went spoon crazy. I took every spoon going – big, small, plastic, wood – even the occasional ladle. I tried to keep my cutlery addiction secret from my co-stars on *Friends*, but eventually I had to reveal the truth. That I was a brilliant actor and I wrote all the jokes myself.

Did spoons feature prominently in your career?

I did spoon with Julia Roberts, Gwyneth Paltrow, and millions of other beautiful actresses who were desperate to work with me because I was so brilliant and wrote all the jokes myself.

Was there any spooning with Jennifer Aniston on the set of Friends?

No, but I did ask her if she fancied a fork.

Did you write that joke yourself?

Yes, I did, with the help of a huge script-writing team and a showrunner. But basically, yes, the joke was mine. And I did deliver it brilliantly.

Are you over spoons now?

Yes. I spent a lot of years in rehab, and I've got to a point when I can handle spoons now, but they nearly killed me. They're much more dangerous than knives.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in relation to spoons?

I'll ask the team. Hey, guys, can I come up with another joke, please? Something funny, related to a spoon, you've got 20 minutes. (20 minutes later) As Chandler would say, "Could I BE any more spoony?"

Ha ha ha ha! Thank you, Mr Perry.

NEXT WEEK:
David Schwimmer, Me and My Schwimmers.



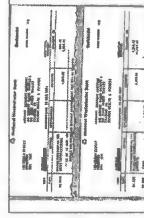
100 Objects That Made The BBC

CELEBRATE 100 years of the British Broadcasting Corporation with these nostalgic items of TV memorabilia:



LANDLINE

The phone used by Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross to call Andrew Sachs.



FALSE BANK STATEMENTS

Martin Bashir's faked bank statements that secured the Diana scoop.



COLD CHEESE

The cold cheese that was served to Jeremy Clarkson instead of a steak, resulting in a punch for the producer.



CHEQUE

The cheque that was given to Cliff Richard for filming his home from a helicopter during a police raid.



OLD LICENCE

For just £159, this used to fund the entire BBC until the government abolished it in 2023 and (You're fired. Ed.)



JIM'LL FIX IT BADGE

The Jim'll Fix it badge awarded by Sir Jimmy Savile to Roy Harris for painting Stuart Hall.

Film highlights

They Flew To Beijing

End of History Channel 9pm



REMAKE of the legendary wartime classic *They Flew To Bruges*, with the action updated to 2022. Ex-Wing Commander Chalky Chalkington (played by Harry Styles) must lead a small band of former RAF pilots in a daring mission to get paid huge amounts of money to train the Chinese Air Force. Will they succeed before the Ministry of Defence finds out and starts complaining about conflicts of interest? Or will they save the free world by helping China invade Taiwan, as ordered by President Xi (an in-form Timothée Chalamet)? Thrilling aerial sequences over Taipei by the Extremely Red Arrows make this a must-see film or else you're arrested.

EYE VIEW: Never in the history of aviation has so much money been given to so few for such a terrible reason.

DIARY



THE RT HON. LIZ TRUSS MP

Talk about a roly-coasty ride! If you said it was hectic I wouldn't try to correct you!! But just think what we got done in our short time in No.10. Let's be honest. We did what we set out to do. We delivered, delivered, and delivered. Not just once. Not just twice. But three times over. But more, much more than that. We then adjusted to prevailing circumstances. And re-delivered, re-delivered. And re-delivered. Because if you find that though your delivery was great but you got the address wrong, then you owe it to the next generation to re-set your delivery for a later date. So that's why I leave No.10 with my head held high. I've done everything I set out to do – and more!

And my farewell speech outside No.10 went down totally brilliantly! One hundred and ten percent, as they say on *Cash In the Attic*, which, sorry, but I'm now glued to!

Afterwards, when I went back indoors, I rang round my remaining Cabinet colleagues for a quick catch-up.

"Hi, Ben! How's tricks? Together we changed things!" I said. "The person you wish to speak to is not available right now. Please leave a message."

"Hi Kwasi! It's Liz! Sorry to have been out of touch these past few days! Busy! Busy! Busy! Howsy-bouty a spot of lunch tomorrow? Be great to catch up!"

"The person you wish to speak to –" I delivered some very warm and considerate messages to their in-boxes, knowing they'd be thrilled to hear them when they could find the time!

The next day, my first day as a "Distinguished Former Prime Minister", I convene a working breakfast. Around the table are myself, my laptop, my mobile, and a fabulous cup of coffee. "Let's bang a few heads together!" I say, as I tuck into the Special K. We're a tight-knit team, focused on delivery.

Then I make a courtesy call to President Zelensky, to assure him of my continued support. I'm put straight through. "This is the office of President Zelensky."

"Liz here, Liz Truss! Busy-busy-busy! Just to say –"

"You are being held in a queue."

Thank goodness! This gives me a little window to put in a call to LBC. Within seconds, or at least minutes, I'm on the line to the assistant producer of the fabulous Iain Dale show.

"It's Liz!" says I. "Liz Truss!"

"Remind me."

"My vision is to set this great country on a path to deliver my vision of how to set this great country on a path to deliver my vision of how to set this great country on a –"

"Bit busy today, Liz – but thanks ever so much for calling and do try again soon 'cos we always love to hear what ordinary people are thinking! Bye, love, Bye-eee!"

Delighted to find I have a real foothold in the media. Next stop, *Strictly*!

And, as expected, the offers keep flooding in! AVIP speaking engagement to local business leaders in Nantwich, date tbc, all expenses paid. An interview with BBC Radio Berkshire some time before Christmas. A signed photo for a prestige charity auction to be conducted by Lord Archer at a central London location, other lots include two Upper Circle mid-week tickets to Mother Goose at the Theatre Royal, Norwich and a football signed by Rebekah Vardy.

Chat with my new agent, Carol. Might she get me on *Countdown*? I ask. She says it's a very popular slot, but she'll have a go. I then add that I am very excited that *The One Show* might want me on. She corrects me. "Actually, Liz, I said there's 'one show' that might want you on. It's the drive-time show on Radio Sevenoaks FM. They seem really quite keen to feature you when there's a gap, perhaps sometime after Christmas and New Year." Great news – I do my homework, and discover Radio Sevenoaks FM has a listenership upwards of 25,000, with many influential local business leaders among them.

But – even for those of us who are former Prime Ministers, real life goes on! Hey-ho!

I go out shopping in my local market town, where I am warmly greeted by traders and shoppers with V for Victory signs! I buy six bananas for £1.40 and hand over a pound. The greengrocer says I'm 40p short but I correct him. "I've acted decisively because my priority is to ensure our country's economic stability, so as to help get us through this storm created at least in part by Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine," I say, before moving swiftly on to the next stall.

My lovely husband text me. "Loved that Putin tweet, Liz! I retweeted it! Twice!!! No word back yet from my good friend President Zelensky, but it's early days, and he's a super-busy guy!"

M

As told to CRAIG BROWN

Literary Review

What a Carré On!



The Secret Heart:

John Le Carré:

An Intimate Memoir

Suleika Dawson

(Mudlark, £25)

THEBRE's a narrow but diverting publishing genre best described as the "he loved me most memoir". Or a book in which a woman author stakes her claim to a well-known man (generally dead) who's also famed for bed-hopping.

Their aim is to establish for posterity that the author, and she alone, was Cleopatra to her lover's Antony. The finest recent example is Antonia Fraser's *Must You Go? My Life with Harold Pinter*, which felt like a spirited attempt to stop people banging on about Pinter's affair with Joan Bakewell. Male writers don't go in for this genre much (probably because more kudos is given to Casanova's than Iorn Romeos), although John Bayley's writing on Iris Murdoch is an honourable exception. The good news for those who relish dirty laundry is that *The Secret Heart* makes a thorough job of nailing David Cornwell's scalp to the head of (pseudonymous) author Suleika "Sue" Dawson's chaise longue.

The reader is told time and again that the star-crossed lovers first meet in 1981 when girl-about-town Sue, fresh out of university (this book revives the old gag: Q) how do you know someone went to Oxford? A) don't worry, they'll tell you), is employed to abridge *Smiley's People* so the 50-year-old Cornwell can narrate it himself as an audiobook. Afterwards the "Great Man" takes her for lunch and sets her heart aflame with a barrage of flattery, which she recounts in unsparing detail: "They must have considered you an alpha-plus mind, surely, to have awarded you the scholarship?" He also recommends Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* to her, which even a novice nun knows is literary shorthand for "I'm an incorrigible shagger and will never leave my wife".

Even so, it takes another year,

absences to the women they've seduced.

The key psychological truth here is not that Cornwell had been a spy (George Smiley is, after all, very loyal to his faithless wife Ann), but the fact his abusive father Ronnie was an out-and-out conman. When Dawson asks: "Was I in a relationship with David Cornwell or John le Carré?", you're tempted to reply: "Pretty sure it's Ronnie." In fact, her most piercing insight is probably the contention that Cornwell didn't much like Cornwall, despite owning a house there for years. What she never seems to consider is the possibility the writer lied to her too, or kept old affairs alive – though the thought surely occurs to the reader.

These passages make you long for her to turn this unsparing lens elsewhere, and far earlier in the memoir. After all, even the most louche reader will feel sympathy for deceived Jane Cornwell, dismissed as the Great Man's amanuensis and requested by him on one occasion to phone Dawson directly about changes to the audio script.

By the book's end, this cruel streak is unleashed on his mistress after their affair is briefly rekindled in 1999. When she mildly chides him for putting the onus of making travel arrangements on her when her father has just died, he puts the phone down and never communicates with her again – vividly undercutting the Elysian love-god premise of the entire memoir. But by then most readers will have concluded that Cornwell was a demanding, manipulative, vain, tetchy overgrown schoolboy who used affairs to fuel his writing. No wonder Dawson finally decided to "publish and be damned".

There are also alarming bursts of florid prose, as when a Greek sunset becomes "Apollo riding his chariot into the sea". Other lines are pure Adrian Mole: "Being the secret mistress of the world's foremost espionage novelist and former spy may naturally have coloured my vision in all this."

The real question is: what does the prurient reader get beyond Dawson's contention that she was *maîtresse-en-titre*? She works hard to establish parallels between Cornwell's spycraft and the evasions and duplicity necessitated by his sexual double life, but it all feels laboured. He writes Dawson's address in "code" in his address book, uses a "spook travel team", launders his mistress' expenses via his agent, and calls the places where she can send correspondence "dead letter boxes".

In one passage that is pure Austin Powers, she declares: "It was the First Rule of Spy Club: DENY EVERYTHING." We're told that he was an Enigma machine and she had to "crack the code". But the ruses are no different from those used by common-or-garden adulterers. In fact, you're reminded of how many successful love rats pretend to be secret agents to explain their

First Drafts



'Madly, Deeply – The Alan Rickman Diaries'
by Alan Rickman

parrot's cage. How many times do I have to tell you?... – Sorry, darling, you see I'm between PAs at the moment. Personnel says I keep shouting at them...

"Have I seen your cover roughs? They were meant to be here this morning, darling. Jonathan, stop hiding under that table and bring me those bloody cover roughs... He's a nice boy darling, but I mean... Have I told you about Felicity's new one? It's simply wonderful, darling, just wonderful. All about her being a lesbian but not really and having these fantasies about castrating her ex-husband, like we all do. I had to pay £250,000 to get her away from Faber, but it's money well spent, darling, money well spent, and... Look, I bloody told you, Cecily, or whatever your name is, I wanted a cappuccino. That's right, C.A.P.P.U.C.C.I.N.O... Sorry, darling, it's this new girl, she's Shirley's daughter, but she's not actually very bright. Goes off and cries in the loo all the time. I mean..."

The cover roughs are wonderful, darling, just wonderful, and I've put in that quote from Antonia that you wanted. You know, the one about the planegency of your vision... Isn't Antonia terrific? As terrific as Iris in her way, only... Yes, we ought to have lunch, only I'm... Look, Cecily, you're supposed to be my bloody diary secretary... No, that day I'm seeing Marina at the Ivy. No, wait a minute, Hermione at Langan's. Yes, she's going to do Colette for me. Isn't it wonderful? Colette, darling... I don't know. £300,000... £400,000... £500,000... The accountant will have a fit... "Actually I don't like those cover roughs, darling, I don't like them at all. I'm tearing them up as we speak... Isn't Angela wonderful?... Did I tell you we're reprinting *Hugh Heigh's* backlist? That's right, we're starting with *Not Much Read*, and then doing *Opera Obscura* and *Dead Beyond Recall*... No, I don't suppose anyone will buy them, darling, I don't suppose anybody will buy them at all, but let me tell you posterity will thank me... [Posterity does. Sadly, not to be continued.]

More Literary Review over ↗

Load of wonk

Of Boys and Men: Struggling, Why it matters and What to do about it
Richard Reeves (Swift Press, £20)

IF YOU were to stick Richard Reeves in a jar of formaldehyde, the label on the glass would read: *Hominis think-tankus*. He is the wonk's wonk. Rich likes to kick big ideas about. That's what he did as Nick Clegg's director of strategy, and afterwards when he ran the demos think tank. Lucky old Rich now works at the Brookings Institution, which in think tank terms is the equivalent of winning the lottery.

And now he's got another book out (he's written quite a few): a rather slim work of 180 pages, presumably scribbled down while waiting to go on stage at Davos. His subject is the problem of men and boys.

There's no doubt something unsettling is going on with modern man. "Suicide," he writes, "is now the biggest killer of British men under the age of 45." If you look at the numbers, poor white boys are a disaster at school, university and in the workplace. Men tend to have fewer friends than women, they handle divorce worse, they die of Covid at a higher rate and to cap it all, the feminists constantly tell them off for their "toxic masculinity".

The result is a kind of social



and political horror show. Reeves writes, "men have been more likely than women to support right-wing or protest parties." It was men, he says, who voted for the Sweden Democrats, the basket-case goose-steppers who now hold the balance of power in Stockholm. Men also voted overwhelmingly for Trump in the US and the far-right Alternative for Germany party.

How can we stop this crisis of masculinity? The answer, Reeves writes, is to hold boys back a year in school, because they develop more slowly than girls. Then we need to give much more maternity and paternity leave to parents, but not just when the baby shows up. People should be able to take leave when the little shit hits adolescence, to help them through the boozing and puking phase.

It's all well-intentioned, earnest, unremarkable stuff. But the killer blow to Reeves's argument comes when he quotes an essay by the Kennedy-era intellectual Arthur Schlesinger. The substance of the quote is less important than the title of Schlesinger's essay, "The Crisis of American Masculinity", and the date it was written: 1958. Accidentally telling the reader your new book is just one in a long line of chin-stroking exercises dating back over 60 years takes the wind out of the narrative sails somewhat.

Worse, the unique challenges faced by contemporary man whizz straight over Reeves's

head. He entirely misses out the growing complexity of modern life, and the effect of the baffling financial and technological wizardry that today makes the world go round. Some people might understand what the zillionaire city boys and tech bros are up to; but for those without a PhD in maths or physics, it remains a mystery. The world has become incomprehensible. No wonder so many men give up.

The "poisonous effect of social media" isn't mentioned either. The lives of the rich and the beautiful are now smeared across the internet like a caviar skidmark, a constant oppressive reminder to the poor of the things they can never have. None of this figures in Reeves's analysis either. How can he have missed such obvious stuff? Could his decision to skip over the effects of social media be related to the fact that his old boss Clegg now works at Facebook?

The book ends with a heap of deadening platitudes. "We need a national effort," he writes, adding, with all the force of a charging milk float, that, "we need a positive vision of masculinity." What that positive vision might be, he doesn't say. This is a very frustrating read. The think tankers have dash coming out of their ears, the politicians love them and the eggheads on the *FT* comment desk can't wait to commission them. But this thin volume makes it painfully clear how superficial – how useless – most think tank output really is.

Liz Truss recently found this out to her cost thanks to the Institute of Economic Affairs, the London wonk shop whose potty economic ideas blew up her government.

Creative director ALESSANDRO MICHELE on Gucci's latest luggage advert



When the Spices manoeuvre politically, pundits sometimes cite my 1996 interview with the group in which they declared their Thatcherism and opposition to the single European currency. Such is their influence that it could be said they were precursors of Brexit itself, while their phenomenon was prophetic of this century's Neronian-Trumpian merging of politics and show business.

SIMON SEBAG MONTEFIORE,

The Spectator



Vikingur Olafsson played John Adams's recent piano concerto *Must the Devil Have All the Best Tunes?* – a one-note work from which Olafsson managed to draw a rainbow of textural nuance, before upstaging the whole thing with a tiny Rameau encore that might have been moulded from freshly fallen snow.

RICHARD BRATBY,
The Spectator

This is why I wanted the advertising campaign to recount a situationist dimension where the protagonist traverses a "non-place" that is first and foremost a mental

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

GIANTS SLAIN

■ THE Booker prize triumph of *Sort Of Books*, the tiny, remindful responsible for Shehan Karunatilaka's *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*, set the seal on a splendid year of literary prizes for independent publishers – and a dismal one for the conglomerates.

Indies in 2022 have also won the TS Eliot poetry prize (Joelle Taylor, the Westbourne Press), the Orwell prize for political fiction (Claire Keegan, Faber), the International Booker prize (Geetanjali Shree, Tilted Axis) and the Women's prize for fiction (Ruth Ozeki, Canongate), while the Nobel prize for literature went last month to Annie Ernaux, published in the UK by Fitzcarraldo.

The best performance by a global giant was back in January, when Penguin took four out of five of the last ever Costa category awards. But David ultimately beat Goliath here too, as the poetry collection that was the only non-Penguin winner (by Hannah Lowe, Bloodaxe) took the overall Book of the Year title. The axeing of the Costas doesn't bode well for the behemoths' chances of a recovery in 2023.

■ SORT OF BOOKS is a two-person publishing outfit, with just 18 living authors on its books, so Shehan Karunatilaka was its only shot at the Booker, whereas each of the illustrious imprints at Penguin Random House will have had four chances, plus automatic entry for recent shortlistees and back-up books nominated for "call in". As with Fitzcarraldo

acquiring future Nobel winner Annie Ernaux, or, further back, Bloomsbury welcoming JK Rowling after her rejections from bigger firms, Sort Of was only able to sign Karunatilaka because one of the big beasts failed to do so. *Chinaman*, Karunatilaka's cricket-centred debut novel, was published in the UK in 2012 by Jonathan Cape but it evidently passed on his follow-up, allowing Sort Of's Natania Jansz to snap it up.

Cape has form here: it also allowed Howard Jacobson to take his Booker winner to Bloomsbury and let Richard Flanagan's go-in-house to Chatto instead. A glorious hat trick of Booker blunders!

'Bookborn'

WORD'S FAIL ME

Teresa Monashino

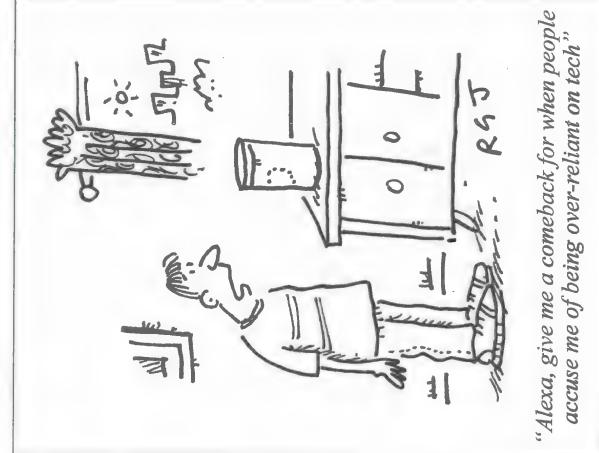
Now then, what's an oxymoron?

ALA GAPPAN MUTHU, ESPNCrictinfo.com

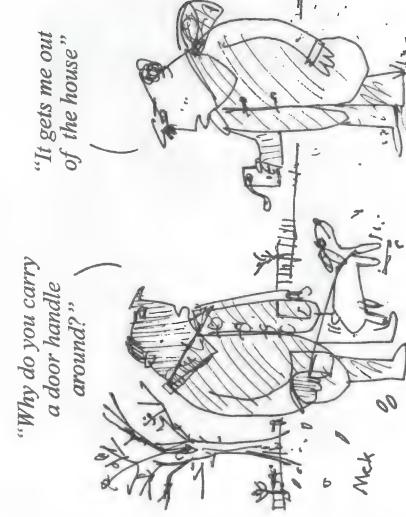
Contributors: Flora Watkins, Ted Harrison, Sam Roberts, Ken Wilson, Benji Wilson.
£10 paid for all entries



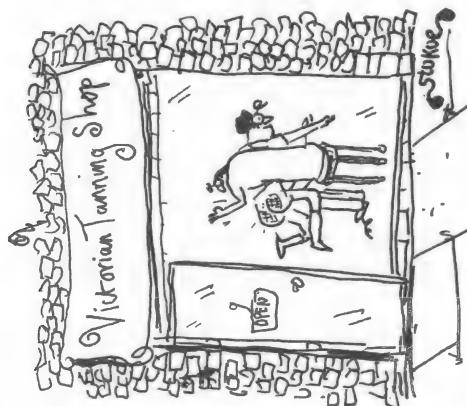
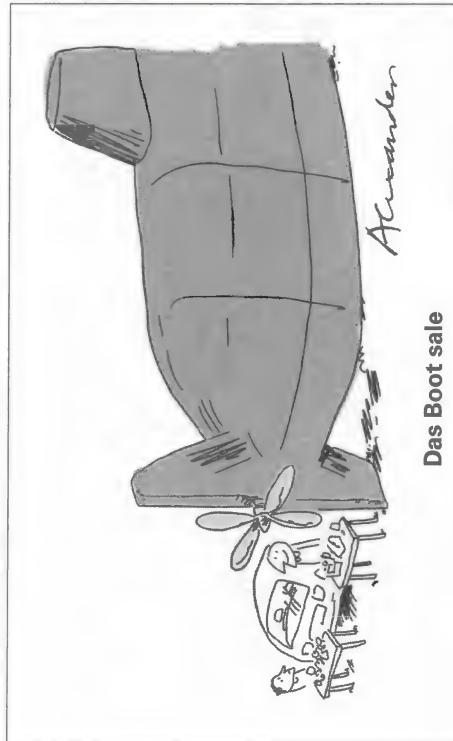
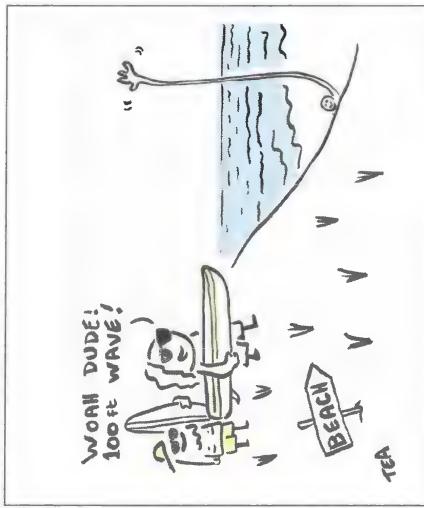
"Dad, this is Colin, my new boyfriend"



"Alexa, give me a comeback for when people accuse me of being over-reliant on tech"



"This is not what I imagined when you suggested fireworks in the bedroom"



IN THE BACK

DISABILITY BENEFITS

Fatal flaws

Chemical bothers

WHEN one of the scientists behind studies implicating dredging near the mouth of the river Tees as a cause of dying marine life (see last *Eye*) appeared before the Commons environment committee last week, he revealed that official concerns over the role of the industrial toxin pyridine are stronger than the government would have everyone believe.

Dredging of the river channel, with the waste dumped at sites off the coast, is due to be followed by deeper dredging to create a new dock, the South Bank quay. This 1km dock is central to the development of the 4,500 acre Teesworks area as the government's flagship freeport zone, and has been described by its developers as "unlocking the wider Teesworks site".

Yet, as Dr Gary Caldwell of Newcastle University told MPs, an official from the Association of Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authorities had told him the government's environment agency wanted his data so they could "work together to stop the dredging of the South Bank".

An email from an IFCA official said the government advisers "agree that if the situation with the dredging is as urgent as we think it is, then we need to act now and work with Defra and [its agency the Marine Management Organisation] to stop it". To date, the government has insisted that the repeated die-offs, devastating the local fishing industry, were due to natural algal blooms.

Anything blocking development of the South Bank quay, funded by a £107m loan from the UK Infrastructure Bank, could prove a political headache. A year ago, then-chancellor Rishi Sunak hailed the funding as "a vote of confidence in the Tees Valley economy and our new freeports that will help turbocharge Britain's post-Brexit growth". Any loss of confidence would not bode well for a wider project that has been placed largely in the hands of local businessmen (*Eyes passim*). The fate of Sunak and regional mayor Ben Houchen's pet project rests on their attracting enough investors and raising enough funding in an already difficult climate to regenerate the Teesworks site.

A spokesman for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs told the *Eye* that the environment agency had not called for dredging to stop, although it did indeed wish to see all relevant evidence on pyridine.

Time for new environment secretary Therese Coffey to pull the government's head out of the contaminated sand and confront the toxic issue.

DEFENCE SALES

Shillers of Hercules

THE RAF's fleet of C-130J "Super Hercules" planes have gone on sale, despite fears this will leave the UK struggling for capacity for military transport.

A brochure from the Defence Equipment Sales Authority was published last month, offering other countries the chance to snap up some or all of the UK's 14-strong fleet of workhorse airlifters, which have seen service in military and disaster relief operations around the world.

"The C-130J is the RAF's primary tactical transport aircraft, capable of airdropping a variety of stores and paratroopers into areas that would otherwise be unsafe for all on board, should they be required to land there," says the sales pitch.

The decision to retire the Hercules fleet was made in last year's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (itself placed under review by Liz Truss in September). The RAF hoped to make cost savings by using only newer Airbus-built A400M planes for airlifts.

POLICE 5

Old coppers

THE Metropolitan Police has been trying to tempt back retired coppers with incentives as it struggles to fill the ranks following a series of scandals.

Letters to former officers (up to inspector grade) asking them to rejoin suggest they will be able to keep a full pension for up to three years on top of salary and allowances. They could also join the Met's 2015 pension scheme, accruing a second pension, in return for signing up "ideally" for at least 12 months.

The Met has struggled to boost numbers ever since former prime minister Boris Johnson, amid rising violent crime, promised to recruit an extra 20,000 officers across the country – reversing cuts inflicted by his Tory predecessors. In 2018 the Met had just 33,300 officers per 1,000 Londoners, the lowest for 20 years.

However, neighbouring forces were not amused when it emerged in June that the Met was offering a £5,000 cash incentive to lure officers to the capital. They accused it of putting its own targets "ahead of community safety".

could impact on the development of government policy, in particular its green paper on disability benefits and its "vulnerable customers policy". But the ICO said the department had failed to recognise there was a strong public interest in being able to scrutinise cases where mistakes had been admitted and recommendations for change to improve safety and prevent similar deaths had been made. Neither had the DWP "provided compelling arguments" about how government policies could be undermined by disclosure.

Reviews into deaths prised from the reluctant department through earlier FOI requests raised concerns at how "vulnerable" benefit claimants had been treated. DWP staff had repeatedly needed to be reminded of what action to take if claimants said they might take their own lives. The reviews suggested that a series of suicides between 2014 and 2019 were linked to the failure of DWP staff to follow rules.

The DWP has yet to release the latest 20-30 reviews while it considers the impact of the ICO's ruling. But with 90 other cases before the ICO, surely the department must realise it's time to quit the fight and disclose them.

Alas, the retirement of the Hercules fleet had to be paused earlier this year because there weren't enough A400Ms for work the RAF needed to do, including equipment deliveries to Ukraine. Now they are due to leave service in 2023.

The UK's 21st A400M was delivered on 11 October, having been ordered in 2010. Just one more is now due, after the order was cut from 25 to 22. However, many of the earlier deliveries are awaiting "retrofitting" of updates. Correspondence from the Ministry of Defence says the retrofit programme is due to take until 2026. Meanwhile, *Aviation Week* reported in August that several A400Ms were grounded at RAF Brize Norton, with no propellers attached, due to a parts shortage.

Even once the planes are all working, experts warn that the larger A400M can't do everything the adaptable Hercules could – such as supporting special forces with landings on scrappy little airfields. When extra capacity is needed, the RAF may hope it can rely on civilian charter airlines to step up. But the private sector can say no – as the government has found when trying to arrange deportation flights to Rwanda, with Titan Airways, Privilege Style and close RAF partner AirTanker all refusing the work.

and poaching skilled staff they had paid to train, hampering recruitment drives elsewhere. Hampshire police and crime commissioner Donna Jones said the Met was masking its real problem – that "people don't want to work for it because of the culture issues and the failings". The Met's letter to retirees said the force was still 4,000 short of its March 2023 target of 36,500. Yet experienced officers have been walking out. It remains to be seen whether the new tone of apology, regret and a determination to change from Met commissioner Sir Mark Rowley will draw officers back in contrast to his more defensive predecessor, Dame Cressida Dick.

Rowley has admitted the force was dismissing "too few individuals in relation to misconduct", after a critical report outlined a litany of dismal cases and a persistent failure to bring officers to account within a culture of misogyny and racism.

Let's hope that isn't the reason one very experienced officer, Gurpal Virdi, has not been asked to rejoin. As *Eye* readers will know, he has been on the receiving end of repeated Met racism ever since he first blew the whistle on bigoted colleagues back in the 1990s!



Sunak and Houchen at the South Bank quay development



Dodgy growth plan

UNDETERRED by regulatory investigations into his dubious “stem cell” therapy for heart patients, struck-off dentist and Celixir chief Ajay Reginald has turned his money-spinning attention to hard-to-treat cancers. But claims to would-be investors that his “innovative medicines” are the “hottest ticket” in the cancer market are again not what they seem.

Celixir’s trial of its “heartcel” repair treatment at London’s Royal Brompton Hospital was halted after just one of 50 proposed open-heart surgery patients was injected (*Eye* 1526). The move followed concerns about research misconduct and patient safety.

Regulators decided no one at Celixir, the company Reginald set up with Nobel prize-winner Sir Martin Evans, would face criminal sanctions over the aborted trial. But investigations into potential regulatory breaches continue. Reginald then tried the lucrative world of Covid-19 testing, becoming chief technical officer at Primerdesign/Novacyt. The company is now locked in a multi-million-pound high court battle with the government over supply polymerase chain reaction tests and machines to hospitals. He also had oversight of another Novacyt PCR product at the centre of whistleblower claims that its validation results were faked (*Eye* 1565).

Since departing Novacyt, Reginald has revived a Celixir-related company, Oncogeni, based in Stratford-upon-Avon, which he set up in 2019. In May he added two new directors and hundreds of shareholders – including Celixir’s investors – just before flogging it to new biotech company Roquefort Therapeutics in a £5.5m shares deal. Reginald is now Roquefort’s £278,000-a-year CEO and Sir Martin Evans, aged 81, its chief scientific



officer – on £100,000 for two days a week. Speaking to potential punters at the Proactive investor forum last month, Reginald cited Evans’s Nobel-winning reputation for embryonic stem cell work to promote Roquefort’s “mesodermal killer” (MK) cell therapy for advanced cancers. The audience were told Evans had both set up Oncogeni and invented its “novel engineered anti-cancer cell type”.

However, Companies House records show Evans was one of two directors who only recently joined Oncogeni’s board and, according to Reginald, also recently acquired shares. The patent application for MK cells, meanwhile, names the “inventors” as Celixir’s one-time patent lawyer, Lee Chapman, and its head of global research, Sabena Sultan. It says the pair adapted Celixir’s so-called iMPs (immunomodulatory progenitor cells) – those at the centre of the “heartcel” debacle – into MK cancer-busting cells.

Professor Patricia Murray, an expert in stem-cell biology at Liverpool University, whose complaints about Celixir’s activities led to the Brompton trial being aborted, told the *Eye*: “These MK cells are very similar to another cell-type called mesenchymal stromal cells (MSCs) that are known to promote tumour growth. It is therefore very worrying that the company might be planning to inject these cells into cancer patients.”

The MK patient also relies on Celixir’s dodgy 2016 “heartcel” research on Greek patients as “good evidence” of human safety. But Celixir was sanctioned by the Greek authorities in 2017 for breaches of good medical practice and failing to obtain proper regulatory approval – something Reginald also failed to mention. The resulting research paper now carries a warning from its publisher, Springer, advising that data findings be interpreted “with caution”.

Unfortunately Oncogeni’s second contribution to Roquefort’s cancer treatment portfolio also relies on flawed Celixir-based research. Celixir claims its “siRNA (small interfering RNA) product”, which can reduce the

expression of a specific gene, could potentially treat advanced breast and colorectal cancers. But the supporting research published in the *PLOS One* journal also carries an editorial warning that “questions remain as to the reliability and robustness of the results” because of the small sample size and statistical analyses.

Reginald told the *Eye* Evans had “founded Oncogeni by virtue of his original equity” – of which there is no public record. Evans was considered a “contributing” inventor because he was named in other associated listed patents. Not the inventor then, and not what Proactive investors were told.

As to not disclosing editorial warnings, Reginald maintained the *PLOS One* data caution about siRNA could be found by following a footnoted reference in the prospectus to another article, and in any event did not change the results of “*in vivo* (living animals) efficacy”. In fact, the research was *in vitro* (ie not involving animals) and the warning referred to all results. On “MK therapy”, Reginald claimed the “carefully worded” warning on the Greek paper did not relate to safety data. Yet the Greek regulatory sanctions *had* raised safety concerns. Reginald also denied MK cells were similar to MSCs and maintained their “good safety profile... will be carefully confirmed in pre-clinical safety studies”.

Perhaps his most revealing response, however, was that neither Roquefort nor Oncogeni were legally obliged to disclose the Greek regulatory penalties because those companies had not been sanctioned. That may be the case, but another Stratford-based Reginald/Celixir company, Cell Therapy Ltd, was sanctioned and it licensed the developed MK technology to Oncogeni which Roquefort is promoting.

Ever since Reginald was struck off the dental register in 2005 for harming patients and defrauding the NHS, he has had a chequered career. But as Prof Murray, a campaigner for medical ethics and research integrity, said: “Investors will likely be so dazzled by the involvement of a Nobel laureate that they may not do the necessary due diligence on Reginald and the Oncogeni products.”

FURTHER EDUCASHUN

Gateway bug

THE University of Lincoln was forced to move around 500 students out of a luxury accommodation block last month because of fire safety fears, raising concerns about the property firms managing vast portfolios of new-build “high end” student housing around the UK.

After receiving a report from an independent fire safety engineer on 10 October, the university informed students living in eight-storey development the Gateway that they had just a few days to move out. The report flagged up the need to make improvements to fire stopping and stairwells in order to improve internal fire compartmentation, without which a building is unsafe for high-rise living. The university believes work can be done to fix the issues, but not while students are living there. It expects the job to take months and says it’s unlikely anyone will be moving back in during this academic year. University staff have been racing to re-house everyone, which is especially difficult as the Gateway included studio flat accommodation suitable for disabled students, with few similar options elsewhere in the city. Students have been given £500 each as a “disruption payment”, costing the university more than £250,000. Businesses renting units on the ground floor have been allowed to stay, but the university says no one can cook or sleep upstairs in the building



Lancashire hotchpotch

ANOTHER risky overseas venture by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) has run into legal trouble, with its campus inside the United Nations buffer zone in Cyprus now reported to be caught up in a €46m court case with the pension fund of the island’s state telecoms company, Cyta. The fund was an investor in the campus development, which sparked concerns from the UN in 2013 (*Eye* 1336) that a large influx of students would threaten the area’s difficult security situation. This peril was in part avoided as the university did not, in fact, attract hordes of students and has made significant losses over the years.

Times Higher Education reported last month that Cypriot court papers detail a large claim of its attempt to build a campus in Thailand, UCLan was pushing ahead with a new campus in Sri Lanka. Company accounts for UCLan (Overseas) Ltd, which is owned by the university, note at the end of July 2021: “The process of closing UCLan (Private) Ltd is continuing, as is the legal case relating to the ended venture in Thailand.”

Pocket money

“PROVIDING care for children should not be based on profit,” a government-commissioned independent review of children’s social care concluded earlier this year, adding: “We should have a sector that is free from profit motive and the distorting impacts of a financial market.”

Recently published accounts for industry leader Cambian Childcare Ltd show that review chair and former teacher Josh MacAlister was on the money with his conclusion that “the current system is a very long way from these principles and ambitions being realised”. In 2021 Cambian, which provides care for more than 2,000 vulnerable children, turned its £111m revenue, largely from charges to local authorities, into a profit of £28m at a 25 percent margin – more than double its margin just two years previously.

The company’s growth has partly been fuelled by the rising number of looked-after children in England, currently standing at more than 80,000. In an additional stroke of luck for Cambian, March 2021 Supreme Court ruling that care workers should not be entitled to minimum wage for sleep-ins shifted the company to keep £12.4m it had previously set aside to pay for a less favourable outcome. This is great news for those in the boardroom: Haroon Sheikh, founder and CEO of Cambian’s parent Caretech, took home £1.1m, including a bonus worth 89 percent of his salary and a £144,000 allowance for temporarily relocating to the United Arab Emirates to head up the group’s Middle East expansion plans. But it’s not always so wonderful for looked-after children.

Based on an inspection at the end of 2021, when Cambian was profiting so heavily, regulator Ofsted found that its home in Bolton, already on a “requires improvement” rating, had deteriorated further. “There has been an increase in the number of episodes of one child going missing,” noted the inspectors, “with the associated risks, including child criminal exploitation, not being fully addressed.” Unable to make contact in such circumstances, “staff are not able to adequately safeguard the child”. Thankfully, ‘shareholders’ and bosses’ incomes remain more than adequately safeguarded.

CHARITIES

Pet projects

DAMNED by two crown court judges and now under investigation by the charity watchdog, Jake Lloyd, the man behind discredited charity Animal Protection Services (APS), is nevertheless back in the pet “welfare” investigation business.

Last year judges criticised APS and its solicitors, the now bust Liverpool law firm Parry & Welch, which jointly pursued dubious private prosecutions against puppy sellers (*Eye* 1566). Judge Nicholas Dean questioned whether they were engaged in a “systematic” costs fraud, while fearing dog owners may have suffered injustice. In another case, Judge Darren Preston said Lloyd had used intimidatory behaviour as part of a “misguided” animal protection crusade which was an “affront to justice”. APS is said to have brought more than 80 prosecutions.

The Ministry of Justice said it would not release details of any prosecution fees it had paid to APS/Parry & Welch because of ongoing investigations. Nor are any shown in the charity’s latest accounts for the year ending March 2021 – they reveal only public donations totalling £371,000. Yet APS expenditure on fundraising, charitable activities and “portfolio management

costs” was a staggering £637,000 – leaving the charity with a £266,000 black hole.

The Charity Commission has opened a statutory inquiry to investigate whether Lloyd or any other individuals connected to the charity benefited inappropriately from its work. But now Lloyd is back. His latest venture is the Animal Welfare Investigations Project (AWIP) – part of his new company, CB Intelligence Ltd, set up at the end of last year. Like APS before it, AWIP is touting for investigatory work, making public appeals for information. Lloyd appealed on Facebook for information about organised dog fighting, offering a “reward of up to £1,000 for information leading to a successful conviction”. In a recent online article, he also sought information about puppy sales in Southampton, saying puppy farming was a “lucrative commercial enterprise”. Similar, it would appear, to investigating it.

Lloyd’s new website says: “Our team have been involved in private criminal prosecutions in relation to animal welfare, including dog theft, unlicensed dog breeding, and cruelty to animals.” Unsurprisingly, there is no mention of how that turned out. Contacted by the *Eye*, Lloyd said he could not comment because of the ongoing Charity Commission inquiry. But he warned: “I would however remind you that any false and defamatory publication will likely be met with potential litigation.” He added: “CB Intelligence Ltd, and Animal Welfare Investigations Project, operates in full compliance of the law when it conducts its work, and at all times the company follows legal advice from experienced counsel and litigators.”

MUSEUM NEWS

Plane barrier

AWARD-WINNING independent museum is set to close its doors this week, having been given the boot from Newquay Cornwall Airport in a bid to get “maximum value for money” from the land.

Cornwall Aviation Heritage Centre moved into the Cold War hardened aircraft shelters at Newquay Airport (formerly RAF St Mawgan) in 2015 when a group of local enthusiasts rescued a collection of historic aircraft from the flopped Classic Air Force Newquay project. The project was privately funded, and a substantial team of expert volunteers work on maintenance and guiding visitors.

The museum’s regional importance was recognised when it was granted £40,000 from the Culture Recovery Fund last year. It picked up a Trip Advisor Excellence award and has won plaudits from local headteachers and college leaders for its work experience schemes. However, Newquay Airport is now owned by Cornwall council, which has terminated the museum’s lease, with a deadline to fully vacate the site by next March.

The council says it wants to increase the “economic benefit” it gets from small regional airport ownership, by developing the business and transport infrastructure within the airfield area. It says it gave the museum plenty of warning that its lease would not be renewed and allowed extra time for a new site to be found.

Baffled local observers note that a thriving museum seems like a significant benefit on the large airport site. Nearby businesses include a jacuzzi firm using a hanger for storage and Biffa refurbishing wheelie bins – but also, of course, Spaceport Cornwall, where Virgin Orbit’s Cosmic

Girl satellite launcher is due to take flight soon. The museum team say they were paying commercial rent for the site but were forced to close, possibly for ever, at the end of October since no alternative home had been found. With more than 20 planes and thousands of other exhibits to house, there are few suitable sites – plus the museum would need to raise the cost of transportation.

“All of this amazing amenity and opportunity will be lost. Jobs will be destroyed. Valuable and historic aircraft of all sizes will have to be scrapped because of the prohibitive cost of road transport,” said the museum in a statement. “The opportunity to inspire and educate Cornwall’s future generations will be lost. Sixty dedicated veteran and retired volunteers will lose a vital part of their lives.” PS The threat to Chiltern Open Air Museum from developer Comer Homes, which owns its freehold (see last *Eye*), was raised in parliament by local MP Sarah Green two weeks ago. Comer and the museum have released a joint statement saying there is now an “agreed way forward”, but gave no detail over when the land is to be handed over to the museum by the developer, as promised under a planning deal for a now-completed luxury housing scheme nearby.

CLIMATE FUNDING

Coalition of chaos

THE US Climate Emergency Fund (CEF), which gives financial backing to the art vandal climate activists of Just Stop Oil in the UK, has some strange bedfellows who may surprise its wealthy backers (*see also p19*).

At least \$100,000 of CEF money has gone to the Coalition for Sustainable Jobs (CSJ), of which CEF is in turn a member. CSJ’s website explains: “A group of wealthy donors that has funded far-left climate activists is now beginning to support interests pushing more moderate ideas.” CSJ’s website lists 18 member groups and companies, some of which appear to have vastly differing goals from Just Stop Oil’s climate activists. People in these “moderate” CSJ member groups include those bigging up fossil fuel use and nuclear power, as well as evangelical Christians, anti-abortionists and, ER, pro-gun lobbyists.

CSJ member Evangelical Environmental Network’s website advises: “As a biblically orthodox Christian organization EEN totally rejects nature worship and pantheism... we are to worship only the Creator – never His creation. There is only one God in three Persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Conservation Hawks, another CSJ member, is a group of anglers and hunters whose climate change concern is linked to perpetuating the “heritage” of shooting wildlife with guns or longbows. In June, its president Todd Tanner wrote in the *New York Times*: “Guns are the bulwark that stands between the forces of liberty and the odious tyranny of the federal government... this particular ‘truth’ is held as self-evident by many here in Montana, as well as in other rural states across the country.”

Hmm. The US is still reeling from the 6 January insurrectionists’ armed attempt to overthrow the “odious tyranny” of federal election results. Benjamin Backer, meanwhile, is president of CSJ member American Conservation Coalition. His tweets include: “Opposing nuclear energy = opposing climate action,” and “No matter how much clean energy we embrace, we aren’t getting rid of fossil fuels. You can either work to improve things within that reality or ignore it.” CEF, Just Stop Oil and CSJ members have so far not answered questions from the *Eye*.



Let's get fiscal

WITH perhaps £50bn a year to find to fill the public finances hole, prime minister Rishi Sunak will need more than Austerity 2.0. But raising taxes always runs into pushback from Tory donors representing interests in the City and business, many supportive of short-lived low-tax Trussonomics. So it will be a test of the Sunak “inclusive” approach to see which, if any, political, business and personal connections are targeted by chancellor Jeremy Hunt's “eye-watering” choices in the autumn statement.

Restricting or ending non-dom tax status, until recently enjoyed by Sunak's wife, would be a potential source of immediate revenue but possibly one that declined as non-doms leave or choose not to live here – always the counterargument. A recent report from Warwick University and the London School of Economics (LSE) estimated taxing non-dom overseas income and capital gains could bring in up to £3.2bn a year without a mass exodus. However, non-dom numbers have fallen from 120,000 in 2016 to 68,000 in 2020-21, liable for £7.9bn in tax and national insurance (NI) for the privilege of living here.

The exodus argument has also been previously deployed to counter suggestions of taxing private equity profits from “carried interest” as income – ie at the same 45 percent rate as other high earners – rather than as capital gains at a much lower rate, a deal agreed in 1987 when private equity was not the major player it is today. The tax rate on “carried interest” was increased to 28 percent in 2015.

In 2020 a previous Warwick/LSE report estimated a rise to 45 percent could bring in up to £440m a year. Data from HM Revenue & Customs for 2017 had revealed that £2.3bn had been paid as “carried interest” – the bonus to private equity managers from their 20 percent performance fees – to just 2,000 individuals.

Last November, then chancellor Sunak ignored proposals from the Office of Tax Simplification (OTS) to more closely align income and capital gains tax rates, despite the OTS suggesting this could raise £14bn a year. That would remove the tax advantage on “carried interest”. Labour has pledged to close this lucrative loophole.

Raising capital gains tax for everybody would sidestep private equity claims of discrimination against the industry, which is a major UK investor and employer. Last year these arguments appeared to have prevailed. But will that now be the case?

Much more revenue-productive than more tax on “carried interest” would be to end the exemption from employer's national insurance contributions for limited liability partnerships on their payments to partners. The LLP loophole is enjoyed by leading accountants, lawyers and hedge fund managers, not to mention Tory MPs Jacob Rees-Mogg and former Treasury minister (now Home Office minister) Chris Philp, plus ex-chancellor George Osborne.

Partners or members in LLPs pay income tax and NI on their share of the LLP's profits – paid by the LLP and deducted from their profit share. But because they are classed as self-employed, the LLP does not pay the uncapped 13.8 percent employer's NI contribution payable on employees' salaries.

That saves £138,000 on every £1m of LLP profit share, and when it comes to leading beancounters, law firms and hedge fund managers, those payments are in seven figures. Introduced 20 years ago after threats from the Fat Four accountants that they would move offshore to escape individual liability for ever-rising damages awards over missed frauds or crunching the wrong numbers, LLPs became a major (and legal) NI-avoidance device.

Members and/or partners can be allocated a discretionary and/or fixed share of profits depending on their status. They make drawings during the year against that profit share. Such payments can total more or less than the profit share, so allocated profits and drawings/ payments differ when estimating the potential NI bill for an LLP.

Many LLPs, such as the Fat Four (PwC, Deloitte, EY and KPMG) and “Magic Circle” City law firms, are multinational corporates – with revenues in the billions – in all but their legal structure. They pay employer's NI for their large staffs and salaried partners, but payments to full LLP partners avoid the NI cost faced by companies for directors and other high-earning employees.

Private Eye has been highlighting this anomaly since 2018, during which the cost of the LLP loophole has only grown.

Odious practices

Among the “hedgeies” to have used LLPs is Sunak's backer and former Tory party treasurer Lord (Michael) Farmer of Red Kite Capital. Another is Tory donor Crispin “Odious” Odey. The 16 members of Odey Asset Management LLP shared profits available for distribution of £39.7m for the year to April 2021 – a spectacular rise from £8.25m the previous year. That same amount, if paid as salary to the individuals as UK employees, could have required employer's NI contributions of £5.5m. “Odious”

calls shorting the pound and UK government bonds the “gifts that keep on giving”. Like LLPs, Marshall Wace LLP, founded by Tory donors Sir Paul Marshall and Ian Wace, made even greater potential NI savings. The profit available for discretionary distribution among the 21 members for the year to February 2021 almost trebled from £1.15m to £3.16m. If paid as salary to UK employees, this could have generated an employer's NI liability of £43m.

The 17 members of Lansdowne Partners (UK) LLP, co-founded by Tory donor Sir Paul Ruddock, who has since retired, were allocated profits of almost £52m for the year to March 2021, up from £49m. That same amount paid as salary could require an employer's NI payment of £7m.

Tory donor Andrew Law, champagne reception host to former chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng after his disastrous mini-budget, was among the 14 partners in Caxton Europe LLP who had to make do with £108m to divide up for the year to December 2021, after £21.6m in 2020. The NI cost if paid to employees could have been £1.5m.

Ex-business secretary Rees-Mogg's Somerset Capital Management LLP has seen profits decline. For the year to March 2021 the profit available for discretionary distribution fell from £1.15m to £9.7m. But that still could have cost £1.3m in employer's NI.

Osborne became a member/partner last year of boutique bankers Robey Warshaw LLP. Its three members shared available profits of just over £30m for the year to March 2021, an increase from nearly £1.8m. This could have cost NI of £4m if they were employees.



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Beans all round

The Fat Four, with their hundreds of members/partners, demonstrate the unfair cost advantage LLPs have over much smaller companies, which have to pay the full cost of their employees. The bean counters pay substantial NI on their staff and salaried partners. But, like the City law firms, they have kept powerful voices inside Whitehall and parliament by cultivating the Tories and Labour with donated services and secondments.

PwC's profit attributable to LLP members for the year to June 2021 shot up to £1bn, compared to £786m for the largely pre-Covid 2020. That 2021 amount, if paid as salary to UK employees, could have required £138m in employer's NI contributions.

The Deloitte LLP profit available for the year to May 2022 was £769m, compared with £708m; if paid as salary to UK employees this could have cost £106m in employer's NI. Ernst & Young LLP reported profits available to be divided of £51.8m for the year to July 2021, up from £46.6m; if paid as salary there would be a potential NI cost of £7.1m. For KPMG the amount available for profit shares and distribution to LLP members for the year to September 2021 jumped from £3.96m to £649m, which could have cost £90m in NI contributions if paid to UK staff.

It is a similar tale within the Magic Circle. Clifford Chance LLP members enjoyed a profit share of £642m, up from £637m, for the year to April 2021, which could have needed £89m in NI if paid as salary in the UK. Linklaters profit available for LLP members went from £53.3m to £57.8m in the year to April 2022, without £80m required if paid as UK salaries. Allen & Overy's full partners saw profits available for division jump from £430m to £520m, which if paid as salary could have cost the LLP £72m. At Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer the profit available for division was down from £430m to £418m, but that could still have needed £58m in NI if paid as salary.

Partner snip

HM Revenue & Customs has been trying to limit LLP avoidance of NI. In 2014 it introduced restrictions to make more member/partners salaried employees – easier with accountants and law firms because there are so many partners. But the exemptions are open to interpretation.

HMRC partially lost a case earlier this year involving BlueCrest Capital Management, founded by Michael Platt (who was filmed bragging to a New York taxi driver in 2019 that he was “the highest-earning person in the world of finance”). Between 2014 and 2019 the hedge fund allocated profits of £338m to members. HMRC claimed £144m in income tax and £55m in NI.

The above small sample alone suggests a potential gain of up to £700m in NI in one year. *More Snicker over £5*

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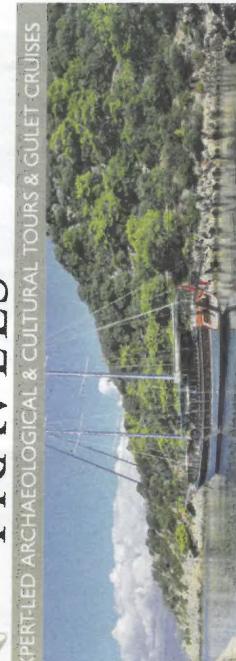
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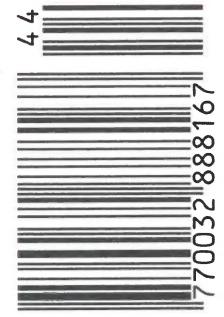


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Screenprint in pink and black, 2003,
numbered from the edition of 600 in pencil
Auction Estimate: £18,000-25,000

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banksy

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